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37

THE
PALM
ANNUAL:

A VOLUME OF

Entertaining and Amusing Literature

FOR

CHRISTMAS

AND THE

NEW YEAR.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

LONDON:

S. MILLER, 37, TAVISTOCK STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

FIRST SEASON, 1871-72.

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THE
PALM ANNUAL.

AN ILLUSTRATED VOLUME OF
Entertaining and Amusing Literature
FOR
CHRISTMAS AND THE NEW YEAR,
1871-72.

EDITED BY
HORACE L. NICHOLSON.

London :

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AND OF ALL BOOKSELLERS.

1871.

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THE PALM

CHRISTMAS ANNUAL.

CHRISTMAS AT ELDERTON PRIORY.



HAT a Christmas was that of 18—! A hard Christmas, such as our forefathers were wont to experience ; iron-bound roads, icicles hanging everywhere, and the lake in the Priory grounds one sheet of bearable ice. And how we did enjoy it ! Little we recked of the starvation and misery the intense cold must bring to the homes of our poorer brethren ; and as day after day passed, and still no signs of a thaw, we rejoiced, one and all. We were a merry party of young folks, gathered in the old rambling Priory to pass the festive season ; ready to join in any fun, and as our number received addition after addition, we welcomed each new comer warmly, and thought, “the more the merrier.”

I was often an inmate of the Priory, for the widowed Lady of Elderton, as she was called all around, was my aunt by marriage. I was an orphan without any settled home, beyond my guardian’s dreary brick house in the dreariest of streets in the little sleepy town of F—, and therefore my visits to the Priory, bringing me as they did into close companionship with my cousins and the young friends they constantly had about them, were sources of unlimited pleasure.

We were a large party this Christmas-tide ; besides my four cousins and myself, there were some eighteen visitors, all about our own ages ; some of them we knew intimately, others not so well ; and among the few comparative strangers, I well remember was a young lady, regarded by most with a good deal of curiosity, for was she not the possessor of ten thousand a-year, and Llandrid Castle to boot ? Now I was too much a “child of the house,” not to be aware that there were certain pecuniary difficulties which made it

hard for my aunt to keep up the ancient state and grandeur which she considered essential to the proper maintenance of the dignity and position of the "Eldertons of Elderton."

A few years before his death, my uncle had speculated to a great extent, and, like many others, had not come out of the venture scatheless, and his widow, after discussing and arranging matters, found that for the future she and her children must live on a considerably reduced income.

Our young visitor, Miss Olivia Anstice, was a beauty, and an heiress, and the eighth cousin of Lord Somebody, and why should not she and Arthur, the eldest son, fall in love and eventually marry? Arthur was a fine handsome young fellow of one-and-twenty—Miss Anstice about the same age ; and I was shrewd enough to give a pretty correct guess at my aunt's views and hopes. Nevertheless, though I clearly saw the advantages of such a union, I did not look upon it with much satisfaction—for from the first I was sure that Arthur did not and never would care for her, and I hoped with girlish enthusiasm that when my favourite cousin did marry he would do so from pure affection.

One cold afternoon, some ten of us were sitting together in the cozy wainscotted library awaiting the arrival of the others, who were skating on the lake. Miss Anstice was one of our number, also Arthur and my cousin Alice. We were all listening with laughing incredulity to a thrilling ghost story Arthur was solemnly relating, when the door opened and Mrs. Elderton entered, accompanied by a young lady—a stranger.

"My dears," she said, "I have brought an agreeable addition to your merry party—allow me to introduce to you Miss Emily Gordon."

How can I describe the young girl who came forward quietly, yet with a perceptible timidity at finding herself the observed of so many observers? I thought her the loveliest creature I had ever seen. She was tall and slight, with a form which Venus herself might have envied, but it was not then—that I, or any of us, recognised all her loveliness. True, we saw that the pure oval face was tinted fairly with delicate pink and white, that the long lashes veiled eyes of the deepest blue, and that her dark hair was coiled round and round a perfectly shaped head ; but not till we knew her better did we fully remark the winning, trustful glance, the sweet expression which enhanced tenfold her beauty of face and form. She came forward with a slight look of shyness, which deepened into a pretty blush as she shook hands, and was severally introduced to each of us in turn.

"And now, Alice," said Mrs. Elderton, turning to her daughter, "will you take Miss Gordon to her room—she must be tired after her long journey ;—the Red Room," she added, as she left us.

I knew this was the only vacant room, yet I felt sorry this fragile-looking girl was to be consigned to it, for it was very gloomy and at some distance from all the other sleeping apartments. I should have liked Miss Gordon to have been more cheerfully located.

"How very beautiful she is," I remarked when the door had closed on her and Alice.

"Do you call a puny thing like that beautiful?" cried Miss Anstice, contemptuously. "Why, she looks as if a breath of wind would blow her away. I don't admire your taste."

"But I do," "and I," "and I," said many voices; and I felt heartily sorry I had ever mooted the subject when I saw Olivia colour up with vexation, and stupidly continue an argument which, as I at last told them, was "neither here nor there, for I didn't think our opinions would alter one feature of Miss Gordon's face, and," I added, thankful of the interruption, "here come the skaters."

They came in, rosy with their healthful exercise in the keen air, and very soon restored good humour by their merry chatter.

"Oh, that's stunning," said Frank Clifton, when we had told them of the new arrival, "we were just one lady short; nothing like equality in this world."

"And now let's be off and dress for dinner," I interrupted, taking the lead in the absence of Alice, "we have only half-an-hour."

With many an expression of dismay on the part of the ladies, we dispersed to our own rooms, and as I walked along the corridor by Olivia's side, and listened to her snappish rejoinders, I had the uncomfortable feeling of knowing that unwittingly I had caused her to take a strong dislike to poor Emily Gordon.

We all met again in the drawing-room, and—contrary to her expectations—when the gong sounded, Miss Anstice was taken downstairs by Frank Clifton, Arthur, her usual cavalier, having offered his arm to Miss Gordon, as the greatest stranger. Not over-pleased was the heiress, judging from her haughty demeanour and short, cold remarks, and seated opposite, I pitied poor Frank his unpleasant neighbour.

That night, when we were all gathered in the well-warmed hall for our usual dance, Alice and I could not help contrasting the two girls standing near each other under the lamp: Olivia Anstice, tall and handsome, with diamonds glittering in her hair, and on her neck and arms, but with that look of disagreeable hauteur I so disliked, curling the full lips into a repelling smile; and Emily Gordon, all her shyness gone, a picture of joyous mirth and radiant beauty, though she wore no ornament, save one white rose twined in her glossy hair. And Arthur Elderton contrasted them also, and before the evening was over had danced again and again with the pretty stranger.

It may seem strange that I should have noticed such trifling circumstances, but I loved Arthur as dearly as if I were really what he often called me, "his little sister;" I was but eighteen then, too, and full of romance, and the "old, old tale" awoke my girlish sympathy, and possessed a charm I did not try to resist; and so, watching closely, as I did, I soon perceived that Arthur had "met with his fate," and that, in spite of herself, he was making

Emily think so too. None of the others seemed to pay much attention to the little romance going on beneath their eyes, or even notice it, with the exception of my aunt Elderton and Olivia Anstice.

From the first I had seen that the former dreaded this, for Emily was the eldest daughter of a country vicar, highly connected indeed, but very, very poor, and if anything serious came of it, where was the ten thousand a-year she was bent upon securing? Olivia Anstice, though mortified at the preference of another over herself, was not a badly-disposed girl—she was vain and proud, but nothing worse; so, instead of trying, as some might have done, to make them miserable and unhappy, she ensconced herself behind her reserved, distant manner, treating Arthur with scornful indifference and not noticing Emily at all.

What was only suspicion on my part, however, was confirmed on Christmas-eve.

Elderton Priory had originally been a monastery, and the grey ivy-covered church, which stood at a little distance from it, had been the place of worship for its inhabitants for ages immemorial, and so, regularly as Christmas-eve came round, the family from the “great house” went down and decked the ancient edifice in its festive attire. What a delightful day we used to make of it! the boys mounted on ladders, hammering away vigorously, and all we girls grouped round the chancel steps, twining festoons, making wreaths, and ever and anon straining our necks to make sure “those boys” were doing their part well, and not like that mischievous Willie Darcey, nailing all our grand Greek designs and monograms upside down! And this Christmas-eve was no exception to the general rule—everyone was gleesome and joyous, the day was clear and crisp, the evergreens just what we wanted, and “all went merry as a marriage-bell.”

Emily Gordon proved invaluable; no wreaths were so dainty as hers, or so quickly made; no festoons so graceful, and our workmen soon found that her eye was the truest, and that when she said a design was straightly placed, straight it would prove to be; so it was “Emily” here, and “Emily” there, and I can safely say not one was jealous of her popularity; she captivated us all with her sweetness, her readiness to oblige, and the winning truthfulness which so few could resist.

I fancy I can see her now, in her dark purple dress, flitting hither and thither, among the massive oaken seats and the marble figures of ancient lords and ladies of Elderton, a very sunbeam of mirthful happiness; and I fancy, too, I can see again Arthur, from some remote corner, following her every movement with “love-lit eyes.” Dear old Arthur! how I hoped against hope that all would be well; but my aunt’s face I could not forget, and I seemed even then to foresee much of trouble and sorrow for the unconscious pair.

The time sped quickly on; ten o’clock found us still busily putting the finishing strokes to our work, and it was not till the old clock in

the tower sounded eleven that we prepared to leave, satisfied that our day's labour was richly crowned with success, and that the venerable old church never looked better.

"I call it glorious," said Ernest Morton to me, as we stood together taking a last look. The others had all gone, we could hear their merry voices ringing through the frosty air. And glorious it was, indeed; the lamps were all out, and the moon, the clear bright moon, shone down through the great stained window, throwing a chequered radiancy of harmonious colouring on the marble floor and the grotesque oak carving, and bringing into relief the massive pillars and the wealth of foliage with which we had twined them. It was beautiful with a grand and solemn beauty, and we slowly turned away, hardly, as it seemed, daring to speak until we had crossed the threshold.

We left the churchyard and reached the rustic bridge; there I suddenly came to a standstill.

"Ernest," said I, "not one of us has remembered either to take old Bridget the key, or to tell her to clean the church to-morrow morning before service. It's no use, I must go back, and alone, too," I added, laughingly. "Don't you know that Bridget hates anything in the shape of a man, and never, if she can help it, speaks to one?"

"Nonsense, I can't let you go alone. Well, see then, I'll take you to her door and wait outside, you needn't tell her I'm there, you know. But what in the world has my unfortunate sex done to cause her to hate us so?" he questioned, as we turned back.

I was in the midst of a long tale concerning the indulged old sextoness, when, as we once more neared the church, two figures hurried towards us. They were Arthur and Emily. Our surprise was mutual, and, I feel sure, never did the moon look down upon two more conscious couples than she did that Christmas-eve. Even in her pale light I saw poor Emily's cheeks were crimson, and I felt mine match them as I caught Arthur's quizzical smile. However, we were all too intensely relieved at the *rencontre* to feel very much put out—Arthur, I think, in particular, for he dreaded his mother's anger.

"How quietly you must have left the church, Ernest," said he, rather nervously, "we were examining that beautiful I. H. S. so closely, that we had no idea we were left behind, and were hurrying on, hoping to overtake you."

Examining that fine delicate work by moonlight! I could have laughed outright—I know I smiled.

"You never would have overtaken us," said Ernest, laughing, "if Maggie hadn't remembered that none of us had told old Bridget about cleaning the church."

"And do you mean to say you are going there now?"

"Yes, we are, indeed; it's a case of necessity, so Maggie says."

"Yes, that it is," and I seized Emily's arm, "so we had better hurry."

I don't think either she or I enjoyed that walk, for we dreaded

the chaffing which we knew our imprudence would expose us to, and we walked at such a pace that I, at all events, was all but breathless when we reached the Priory.

There was Mrs. Elderton standing in the hall, looking out anxiously, and I felt Emily's arm tremble like a leaf. I pressed it warmly, and as she looked in my face and our eyes met, we knew that we had each divined the other's secret. And then she fondly returned the pressure, and from that minute we were firm friends.

We need not have feared, though, for Mrs. Elderton was kind in the extreme, she only scolded us laughingly, for our "forgetfulness," and after all we did not get half the teasing we expected. Everyone was tired and sleepy, and we soon retired to our respective apartments.

And yet as I sat by my comfortable fire, thinking over the events of the day, with an almost unreal feeling of dreamy happiness, Mrs. Elderton once more came into my mind, and I hated myself for the uncharitable thoughts which *would* force themselves upon me. Was that kind, petting manner of hers towards Emily Gordon sincere, or was it—

I jumped up hastily, kissed the sleeping Alice, and was soon lost in the land of dreams.

Christmas morning rose bright and clear, and Alice and I opened our window wide to hear the pretty chimes ringing joyously through the frosty air. And as we took our places at the breakfast-table, and the old Christmas greeting passed merrily from one to the other, how little we dreamt of the dark cloud which was so soon to envelope us in misery and despair.

I ran into the conservatory an hour before church time, and was gathering a choice bouquet with which to adorn the dinner-table, when Arthur entered.

There was an anxious, old look on his usually laughter-loving face, and as we stood there, screened from sight by the shrubs, I saw he wished to say something of importance.

"I am so glad to find you alone, Maggie," he began, "I have been wanting you so much."

"Have you, Arthur? What is the matter?"

"Well, a good deal. But I say, Madge, didn't we do it finely last night?"

The words were so different to what his desponding countenance had led me to expect, that I could only look up and stare in amazement. He was laughing all over, and the glance I met made the colour mount to my cheeks.

"Dear little Madge," he said, in his affectionate caressing tone, and he spoke gravely now, "I cannot tell you how glad I am of this."

"Oh, Arthur," I could only manage to say, and I hid my burning face in the sweet-smelling shrub.

"I like Ernest Morton better than any fellow I know," he went on. "He is thoroughly good, and the way he told me of his love for you has made me like him better than ever. He is a right good friend to me, and you have drawn a prize, little Mag."

Of course I knew this as well as he did, but all the same I liked him none the less for saying it.

"And so, Madge, darling, I wish you any amount of joy, with my whole heart."

There was something so inexpressibly tender and pathetic in his tone, as he said the last words, that I felt a longing desire to comfort him, and give him, too, the happiness he sought. I looked up, with tears in my eyes, which I strove in vain to repress.

"Arthur, dear Arthur, if I could but help you."

"Thank you, little one, but it's no use. Of course you know how it is with me, and I trust with her, too?"

I nodded assent.

"This morning mamma has been speaking to me about her, and, oh, Maggie," and his voice trembled, "it *is* hard. I love Emily better than life itself, and I hope—I think she cares for me; but mamma—" he stopped abruptly, "well, you know how reduced our income now is, and she has set her heart on my securing that wretched ten thousand a-year. Why, she even tried to make me promise to give up all thoughts of Emily and—"

"You didn't, Arthur?"

"No, no;" and he spoke vehemently. "I told her I never would, and at last, when she flew into such a terrible rage, I swore there and then that if I did not marry Emily Gordon, no other woman should be my wife."

I looked up startled; the fierce tone was so utterly unlike Arthur, my easy-going, good-natured cousin Arthur.

"Still," and the smile which stole on his lips was like the sun breaking through a cloud, "still, I cannot feel entirely miserable, though I *am* taunted with want of family pride, with the downfall of the Eldertons, with disrespect and disobedience, and goodness knows what besides, when I think of winning *her*, oh, Maggie—"

"Dear old Arthur," I said, gently.

"Maggie," he continued, after a slight pause, "you are the only creature in the whole world to whom I have spoken of this, you will not abuse my confidence?"

"That I never will," I answered, earnestly.

He bent down and kissed me.

"You are like my own sister, Mag; indeed, more, I fear, than are really my own, I cannot tell them of this. Alice is a dear girl, but she would only laugh at me, and tease incessantly. Mabel is too like our mother, and Nelly—well, she is only a child."

At this moment voices were heard inquiring for me.

"I must go, Arthur," I said, "but remember, if I can in any way help you or Emily, you will come to me."

"God bless you, Madge," was all his answer, and I turned away, trying to choke down a strange feeling in my throat.

"Maggie, where *have* you been?" The voice was Alice's, and she came flying towards me, all black velvet and grebe; "come, make haste, you haven't even got your jacket on, you'll be late. I'll come and help you."

Her absurd remarks soon, as usual, sent me into fits of laughter, and chased away the sadness poor Arthur's words had caused. Then we all went to worship in the holly-decked church, and, with Ernest on one side and Emily on the other, I heard the clear young voices of the chorister boys swell the refrain of the sweet old words, "Peace on earth, and good will towards men." And the echoes lingered above among the old rafters, as if unwilling to leave, and I listened and listened, till, when we left the church, and the organ pealed forth the grand voluntary, "Gloria in excelsis Deo," I felt as if I could sing my whole soul out, in unison with the glorious harmony.

Well, Christmas Day, with all its pleasures and merriment passed, away, and seated once more musing before our bed-room fire, I confessed to myself that it had been a day of almost unalloyed happiness. The "almost" I felt was the sight of my aunt's great though carefully concealed anger and annoyance; knowing what I did, I easily saw through the forced gaiety of her manner, and so also did Arthur. Still, hope is strong at eighteen, and I hoped vaguely all would yet come right, as I had said that evening to Emily Gordon, hoping thus to comfort her, for she too had accorded me her fullest confidence.

Seated in the twilight, she had told me with pretty shrinking shyness of her love of Arthur. "But, oh Maggie," she had said, "I cannot tell what to think of Mrs. Elderton. She always treats me and speaks to me with the greatest kindness and even fondness, but sometimes I have caught her looking, oh!—as if she could—kill me!" and she shuddered and drew closer to me.

"And I was afraid of this," she had whispered, "for we are very poor, and I have nothing of my own, and I tried so hard to avoid him, Maggie, but—it was no use," and she almost sobbed.

What could I do but comfort her as best I knew how? and somehow we had at last worked each other into the belief that all *must* come right at last, and in this pleasant frame of mind we had joined our companions, determined to enjoy this evening at least.

But now as I sat alone, quietly thinking it over, Alice as usual being fast asleep, I felt sundry misgivings. My aunt's manner as she kissed Emily on saying "good night" had not tended to reassure me, and I remember gravely shaking my head as I thought of it. However, I dismissed these uncomfortable feelings summarily, and rose up to wind my watch. My keys were not as usual in my pocket. I considered a moment, then I recollecting having lent them to Frank, who had been trying to open a cabinet in the drawing-room. No doubt, thought I, they are still on the table. Get them I must. I could not bear to leave my watch unwound, so without further delay I drew my dressing-gown closer round me, opened the door, and looked out. All was dark, dreadfully dark, but this did not disconcert me, for I knew every inch of the house by heart; my only feeling was one of dismay that I had sat up so late. Without much difficulty I groped my way to the drawing-room, found my keys, and soon reached our door again. When there, I stopped suddenly. Were those voices I heard? Tales of ghosts, burglars,

and all sorts of dreadful apparitions at once passed through my mind, and my heart almost ceased to beat.

"Not afraid—I must have it—third corridor to the left" were the words I caught, and then came a low-toned answer, too low to hear.

Again the first voice spoke: "You know your way—go!"

The feeling of thankful relief nearly took away my breath, for the voice was Mrs. Elderton's.

I at once concluded she was giving some order to a servant, for her tone was one of imperative command; and without troubling any further, and strongly inclined to laugh at my weak nerves, I re-entered the room, and in two minutes was in bed. I lay for a while drowsily wondering what the servant was to do in the third corridor to the left, for that was the unused corridor, and as children we had always declared it haunted, and though professing to ridicule each other's fears, had, nevertheless, studiously avoided it after nightfall. It was situated in the oldest part of the mansion, and was traditionally said to have been the place where the dead monks were laid before interment; certainly it was dark and gloomy enough to conjure up any dreadful fancies, and, thought I, with a sleepy shiver, "I'm glad *I* haven't to go there at this time of night."

Presently the bell of the great clock in the west turret struck the hour of midnight, and, ere the tingling echoes of the twelfth stroke died away through chamber and corridor, a shriek—the like of which I earnestly pray never to hear again—rang out, and mingled its echo with those of the departed hour.

I started up wide awake, trembling from head to foot. Such agony, such fearful despair was expressed in that terrible cry, that I shivered again and again as I sat there waiting, yet dreading its repetition.

Had I gone to sleep and dreamt it? I questioned, as after the lapse of a few minutes I still heard no sound save the wild beating of my heart. What could it be?

Horrified, and chilled with a nameless terror, I crept out of bed and listened at the open door.

All was still as death, and surely, I reasoned, if it had been other than my own fancy, some one else would have heard it. Strange to say, I gave no thought to the servant and the west corridor, for the memory of this was effectually put to flight by the crowd of ghost-stories and legends which rushed through my bewildered brain. Still, disposed to the ideal in preference to the real, as I was at that time, I tried hard to persuade myself I had been dreaming, and shivering again as much from the bitter cold as from fear, I got into bed.

And nature overcame terror, and, in spite of all, I fell asleep.

All was as usual when I awoke the next morning; the sun shone brightly into our room, and, as I thought of the night's fright, I felt inclined to take myself to task for being so imaginative. Nevertheless, I still shuddered a little as I remembered that fearful cry, and I hurried downstairs after Alice as fast as possible.

We were all together with the exception of Emily Gordon. A few words spoken by Frank Clifton soon had the effect of driving away all hopes of the comfortable feeling I was trying to obtain.

"I say, Arthur," laughed he, "is the Priory haunted?"

"Haunted! no; rather not. Why should it be?"

"Well, I heard something queer last night. You needn't laugh," for there was a regular shout of laughter, "I'll lay anything that last night, just as the clock struck twelve, I heard a woman's scream."

Another peal of laughter, and Olivia Anstice said scornfully, while I sat down sick and faint,

"The clock tolled twelve indeed! Just the time for ghostly visitations. I envy you anything so exciting, Mr. Clifton."

"You needn't," and his cheek flushed a little at her tone; "of course I don't mean to say but that I was dreaming; any way, I don't want to dream like that again—it was awful, simply awful."

"Maggie, Madge," and Ernest came hastily to my side, "what is it? You are as white as death."

I tried to speak—and could not, my voice seemed to be leaving me, but at last I made a desperate effort, and gasped out,

"I—heard it—too."

There was a dead silence, then two or three, among whom was Olivia, laughed a little nervously.

"Nonsense, Maggie, it's impossible. You surely don't believe in ghosts, if Frank Clifton does?"

I was too utterly sick at heart to laugh it off; besides Arthur's questioning gaze was upon me, and Alice, my favourite Alice, knelt before me, and looked into my face with her black eyes fixed imploringly on mine.

"Maggie," she whispered, "say—was it—was it—the death-wail?"

And we knew she alluded to an old Elderton tradition; and not a smile crossed the face of any one in the room. Then the breakfast-bell rang, and we filed downstairs in silence, and took our places at the table.

"Why, wherever can Emily Gordon be?" at last cried Minnie Bertram, a girl whose lively, thoughtless temperament could not long remain subdued.

"Dear me, she is very late," said my aunt. "Nelly, dear, run upstairs, will you, and see if she has overslept herself. Tell her we are all at breakfast."

And as the voice with its false ring fell on my ears, and the memory of that same voice as I had last heard it came to my mind, I turned and looked involuntarily at the empty chair. Again that feeling of deathly sickness crept over me, and with a horrible fear, a fear I would not, dare not, have expressed, I half shuddered, and met Arthur's gaze. His eyes, full of a strange wistful intensity, were fixed upon me, and his face too blanched with a sort of instinctive foreboding of evil. Our eyes met, and we each knew then what the other dreaded.

Soon all was confusion and dismay, for Emily Gordon's room was empty, and she was nowhere to be seen.

How can I describe the fearful suspense, the dull misery, of the next two days, or the unspeakable terror, the shivering dread of five of us, for, though forgotten by all the rest, Frank, Ernest, Arthur, Alice, and myself reverted again and again to that mysterious midnight cry, and in some inexplicable way connected it with poor Emily's disappearance.

My heart bled for Arthur. After those first few hours of almost crushing woe he left the Priory, and roamed over the country, starting inquiries in all directions with frantic eagerness, and as hour after hour passed and still no news came of the lost girl, he turned from us and retired to the solitude of his own room.

Every one now knew his secret, and all pitied and respected his sorrow. But for me was reserved the sight of his bitter grief, his passionate unrestrained anguish, and also, what was worse, the half-expressed suspicions of foul play which dropped as it were involuntarily from his lips. I kept my own counsel. How could I tell him of my dark thoughts respecting his mother and my aunt? But I did what lay in my power. I threw out hints about the west corridor, to Arthur in particular, alleging as an excuse that it was from thence I was certain the shriek proceeded, and somehow he became possessed with some undefined feeling respecting it, and had it searched thoroughly, so thoroughly, that, had he known what I knew, nothing more could have been done.

It was a mystery, an awful mystery, as much to me as to him, and one, too, which I began to fear would never be solved.

And so the second day slowly dragged its weary hours, and still our visitors stayed on, for each was too anxious to learn the fate of the hapless girl to leave willingly.

And the Lady of Elderton? If she were guilty she knew well how to hide her guilt and also all seeming consciousness of it. She went about with us, searching eagerly room after room, and to all outward appearances as grief-stricken and puzzled as the rest; but again and again her voice would startle me into a shuddering recollection of that fatal Christmas night, and the words "You know your way—go"—those stern, unyielding words—beat themselves into my brain till I fancied I saw them written everywhere in blazing letters.

It was a sunny morning that broke on us the third day of Emily Gordon's mysterious disappearance; every one seemed imbued with brighter thoughts, and, as we sat round the blazing fire, our fading hopes seemed to have revived again.

"Mrs. Elderton," said Olivia Anstice, "did it ever strike you that Emily might be what is termed a somnambulist, and have managed to escape from the house in her sleep?"

It was a new idea, and we eagerly grasped it.

"Send for the servants," cried we all, "and let us ask them again if they are sure they found none of the doors open."

So the servants, a goodly array, were brought in, and once more

questioned. All in vain, and then the trustworthy old butler stepped forward.

"I thought of that, first thing, sir," he said, addressing Arthur, "and I went out to look for any trace myself."

"There were no footprints, Samuel?"

"None, sir, that I could make out."

"No fresh snow had fallen during the night?"

"None, sir."

And as the old man spoke, once more the long, loud shriek seemed to ring with terrible distinctness in my ears.

"Arthur," said I, an hour later, coming into the library where he was sitting, pretending to read, by the oriel window. "Arthur."

He looked up.

"I have to go to Stephen's cottage, with a message. Will you come with me?"

"Why, Madge, where is Ernest?" And the ghost of a smile crossed his wan face.

"Aunt has got him to do some writing for her, so I would not tell either him or any of the others I was going. I wanted you."

"All right. I'll come," and he closed his book. "This is weary work."

Poor Arthur, what a dreary, miserable place the world was to him now!

We soon reached the cottage and despatched my message, then we turned homewards.

We had spoken little on our way there, and now, as we came to the bridge, Arthur stopped.

"Maggie," he said, "will you come into the church? Somehow all is so quiet there. I like it."

So we got the key, and in another moment were inside the sacred edifice. I could not but remember the last time I stood there with Ernest. Then the chequered rays fell on the floor, even as now, though with a softer, fainter light. All was the same, but oh! the change in ourselves.

I moved hastily forward, Arthur following, and we seated ourselves in silence upon a marble monument facing the great east window. The peace, the quiet beauty, calmed me as it did him, and after a time I recovered my composure.

And then I turned and looked at him; his eyes were fixed on the painted window—a representation of the Ascension—with such an expression of hopeless misery that I could not but know of what he was thinking.

"And if it is so," I whispered low, "is she not better far—safe for ever?"

"Madge, Madge," and he turned passionately to me, "I cannot live without her." And burying his face in his hands, his whole frame shook with violent emotion.

I knew not how to comfort him; what could I say in grief like

this? But sobbing as I was myself, somehow I *did* manage to comfort him, and after a while his emotion seemed to expend itself, and he sat up again, quieter and more submissive than I had yet seen him. We talked quite an hour, I should think, of poor lost Emily, and then, with a feeling of greater peace and comfort, we rose to go.

I was standing leaning against the monument, watching Arthur settle a few leaves which had fallen out of place, when suddenly I heard a faint sound, issuing, as it seemed, from beneath my feet.

“Arthur,” I cried, trembling in every limb, “what is it?”

Before he could answer, the sound was repeated, this time a little louder. I almost screamed, my nerves were so upset by the events of the last two days, and I flew to him, and clung to his arm. Again and again was the sound—a kind of feeble knocking—repeated, and then, as it seemed from the lowest depths, came a voice, faint indeed, but terribly distinct.

I could bear no more, and sank, half swooning, on the ground.

“Madge, Madge, look up,” the voice was Arthur’s; I did look up, and the look of trembling hope I met soon recalled my senses.

“Madge, what of that old legend about the secret staircase opening into the chapel?”

“Arthur! God be thanked. It is the marble monument; it opens with a spring.”

And yet neither dared breathe the hope which thrilled through our very souls.

“Let us try,” he said, “no time is to be lost.”

The knocking still continued, fainter now, and at longer intervals, and my heart beat so wildly I could hardly hear the feeble sounds. Arthur’s countenance I can never forget, it was white and rigid as a stone statue.

My remembrance of the old legend I had heard in childhood served me in good stead now, for when I began to examine the monument I felt as if I had opened it many a time before.

For a few minutes our hands moved round and round it without effect; I was beginning to tremble as I thought of possible failure, when at last I touched a little polished square.

“It’s here, Arthur! Help me. Press hard.” And lo! a square of stone rolled back, and we saw before us a black vault, and, as our eyes grew accustomed to the dimness, a slight figure lying motionless at the head of a flight of steps.

How tenderly did we bear her out, and hang over her, trying to recall her to consciousness.

“Emily, dear Emily,” I cried, “wake up, wake up. Arthur, run for some water, or no—we had better take her home as quick as ever we can.”

And at that moment a faint quiver stole over the white still face, and with a deep-drawn sigh the blue eyes opened. Only for a moment, then they closed again, and my heart sank as I noticed the grey pallor creeping on the pallid cheeks.

"Maggie, is she dead?" murmured Arthur, and the wistful, imploring tone went to my heart.

"No, no, she has only fainted," I said, "carry her home quick."

An expression of intense joy came upon his face, and as he gently raised the light form I heard him whisper again and again, "Thank God, thank God."

We reached the Priory in less than ten minutes, and soon the doctor had arrived, and under his skilful treatment Emily once more opened her eyes and awoke to consciousness.

I was kneeling by her side, Mrs. Elderton was at the foot of the bed. One look passed between her and the sufferer, and I knew then that my darkest suspicions were confirmed. For on my aunt's proud, beautiful face there came a look of imploring entreaty, a look such as the guilty criminal must give when detected in his crime, and prays for his guilt to be covered, and I knew then that only by a merciful Providence was she saved from the committal of the blackest of crimes—the murder of a fellow-creature.

Days and weeks passed away, and still Emily Gordon remained at the Priory, in too precarious a state to admit of her removal. Her mother—a gentlewoman, in the highest and noblest sense of the term—came and nursed her long and tenderly; and at last, when the warm spring days were budding into early summer, strength returned, and she was saved. And when she did leave us to go to her quiet home in Cornwall, it was as the betrothed wife of my cousin Arthur.

And so the mystery of her disappearance was cleared up, and we all knew how that, by presence of mind and courage such as few possess, she had worked her way along the dark, black, and half-built-up subterranean passage, into which, during a somnambulistic expedition—so ran report—she had fallen.

And none, save myself, knew in very truth how she had found her way to the fatal west corridor, and I knew solely from the few words I had overheard that Christmas night, for never once by word or look did Emily betray the secret; the only time we ever referred to it was one day during her convalescence.

"Emmie," I said, as we sat together at the open widow, watching the village children crown their pretty "May Queen." "You fell through the trap-door in the west corridor?"

"Yes," she answered, shuddering.

"And you were—sent there on Christmas night, and fell just as the clock struck twelve?"

"Maggie, darling, don't speak of it, she was not in her right mind, I am sure she was not."

And that was all we ever said upon the subject. Whether my aunt sent her deliberately, knowing for a certainty it was to cause her death, or whether she had for the moment forgotten the fact of her having that evening set the machinery by which the "lift" worked in motion, remains between her conscience and her God. Anyhow, no more objections were raised to Emily's becoming her son's wife.

* * * * *

There was a double wedding in the beautiful old church one balmy spring morning, a year later, for Arthur and Emily both agreed that no other place was so fitting for their marriage. Ernest and I, too, loved it better than all the churches in Christendom, and in the midst of our own great happiness, we could yet see and rejoice at the calm, grateful joy of the two so nearly parted for ever.

And long years after, when Mrs. Elderton was dead, and Arthur and Emily were happily settled in the old Priory, and my husband, Ernest, lay sleeping his last long sleep in a quiet, honoured grave in the wild forests of Canada, I returned and paid a visit to the home of my childhood.

And one day, when scanning the backs of the dust-covered folios I had always revered, I took one from its place, "Ye Historie of ye Priorye of Elderton," and read the following:—

"Under this Priorye, built by ye goode monkes of Elderton, there runneth a passage. This passage hath no steps communicating with ye upper pourtion of ye house, but is reached by ane haul or lift, whilk being placed under a heavie trappe doore in ye third gallerie to ye left, is set in moution by machinerie contayned in ye fourth vaulte, and when ane personne steppeth upon it, he is gentlie carried doun a shafte into ye passage. This subterranean passage reacheth to ye chapelle, whence it openeth behind ye marble monument of ye puissant Lord of Elderton, by pressing a smoothe square inch of stoune. It is specially adapted to ye private devotions of ye goode monkes."

A. G. J.

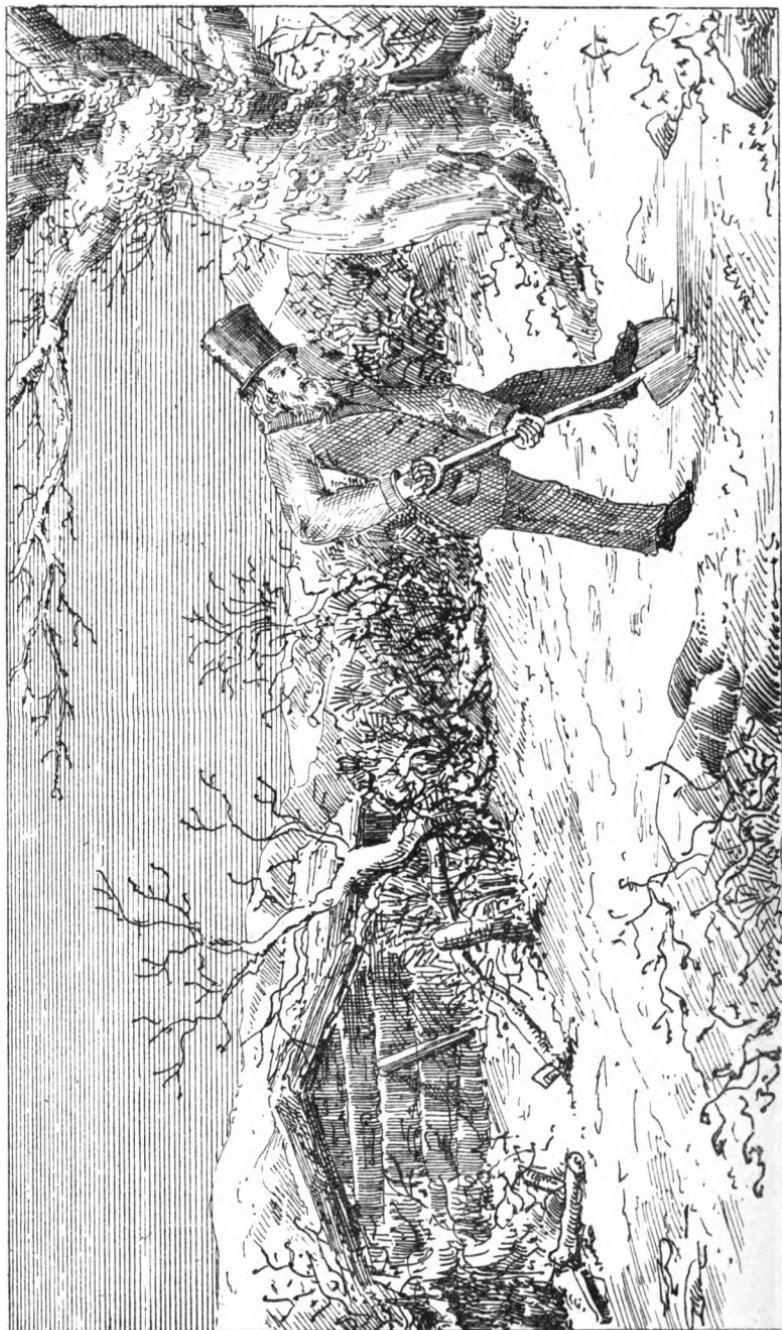
THE OLD FAMILIAR HOME.

I HAD a dream, a weird, wild dream,
 I thought that I was old,
 That fourscore years had o'er my head
 In quick succession roll'd ;
 'Twas Christmas Eve, the world was deck'd
 In regal robes of snow,
 Which sparkled like some fairy realm
 'Neath Luna's silvery glow.
 Within the festive banquet hall
 The sparkling yule logs blaze,
 And gay hearts quaff, with merry laugh,
 Long life and happy days ;
 I heard the village children sing
 A merry Christmas lay,
 I sighing, said, "Would I were half
 As innocent as they ;"
 They brought back visions of my youth,
 Where oft I used to roam
 Around that sweet and hallow'd spot,
 That old familiar home.

I heard the distant village clock
 Ring out a solemn chime,
 Which told me I'd done nought through life
 But mis-spent precious time ;
 Old age had come, and on my head
 Had heap'd a load of years,
 And down my withered cheeks in streams
 Did roll the scalding tears ;
 Enslaved by that dark demon drink,
 My days were passed in vain.
 "O would to heaven," I sighing said,
 "That I were young again,
 That I were young, and stout, and strong,
 In manhood's vigorous prime,
 With hope my beacon, faith my guide,
 I would redeem the time."
 Alas ! in youth's bright morn, I thought
 Old age would never come,
 When roaming round that hallow'd spot,
 That old familiar home.

I speak of faith, I talk of hope,
 Alas ! what boots it now,
 Could faith or hope e'er penetrate
 The wrinkles of this brow ?
 Once more I seized the demon cup,
 Once more I grasp'd the bowl,
 To drown in dark oblivion's depth
 The frenzy of my soul ;
 The draught awakened in my breast
 A flame of fierce despair,
 I cursed and howled, and gnashed my teeth,
 And tore my silvery hair ;
 Till reason to my breast returned,
 And my proud spirit bow'd,
 I sat down by the warm fireside,
 And wept both long and loud,
 All, all my happy dreams had pass'd,
 Like billows' idle foam,
 Dreams cherished in that hallow'd spot,
 That old familiar home.

I call'd to mind the forms of youth,
 Those forms that long had gone
 Into the vista of the past,
 And left me here alone,
 The last bright ray of hope had fled,
 Quenched was its final gleam,
 When, suddenly I woke and found
 It all a transient dream.



Miner Lancaster.

Upon reaching the spot, Gabriel immediately set to work.

I saw the brilliant summer sun
 Shine through the window pane,
 And found myself, oh ! happy change,
 In boyhood's braes again.
 Thus backwards, through those bygone years,
 As if by magic borne,
 I found the gloomy night was changed
 Into a happy morn ;
 And that same morn, no mansion fair
 With high and stately dome,
 Seem'd fairer than that hallowed spot,
 That old familiar home.

WILLIAM AITKEN.

GABRIEL MOTH'S ADVENTURE.

By FREDERICK J. STIMSON.

GABRIEL MOTH was a man, yet—like the insect whose name he bore—he was frequently among his own and other people's clothes, from the simple fact that he was a tailor. He might possibly have been a wealthy man had he taken less to drinking ; but he was a believer in spirits, and he would argue that, to keep away the supernatural spirits, a person must imbibe the liquid spirits, and, in illustration of his assertion, he frequently did the latter ; but, on the contrary from driving away the spirits, it made him fancy he saw more, and when people told him of the failure of his own principle, he would say that if it did nothing else, it gave him nerve to face them. Of course, no one believed him when he described the visits and invitations he received from spectres, goblins, and such like pleasant beings ; in truth, everyone laughed at him. Gabriel put this down to bad manners and general inclination to disbelief. Gabriel's wife, with the rest, used to laugh at and jeer her husband, and the excuse he made when found at the village inn was, that he could'nt stop at home and be "nagged" at by his wife, who frequently bawled herself hoarse in doing so.

Gabriel himself was a little shrivelled-up being of fifty, his height being something between four and five feet ; a comb seldom visited his hair, but rumour says that his head often received a visit from a three-legged stool—though Gabriel stoutly denies this : Mrs. Moth could settle this dispute !

Mrs. Moth was a buxom lady, and when I state that Mr. Moth was her third husband, the reader will perhaps be confirmed in this opinion. The cold weather, which had now set in, affected her but little ; in fact, she preferred it to the hot, for the hot

weather seriously affected her weight ; like the majority of women, she had a temper, and—as Gabriel knew to his cost—a tongue.

At the time our story commences, some little consternation and grief were reigning in the village of which Gabriel was a resident. A few days since a certain Squire Mayhew—a good, kind-hearted gentleman—had left his home to transact business with a London banker, and had not been seen since. Enquiries had been made, but up to the present time, without success. Through this sudden calamity the whole of his family were thrown into mourning. A large reward—£ 500—had been offered for any particulars that would throw light upon his mysterious disappearance ; as he had a deal of money in his possession, it was feared that some ill had befallen him.

One cold night, three days after the squire's disappearance, Gabriel and his wife were seated facing each other, opposite a bright warm fire ; they had been discussing the various topics of the day, and, amongst others, the squire's disappearance had had a place.

As the old-fashioned clock in the corner of the cosy room struck the hour of nine, Gabriel rose, took his coat and hat off their peg, and proceeded to put them on, his wife watching him the while with an observant eye. Having adjusted his garments Gabriel proceeded into the scullery, and upon his returning to the room in which his wife was seated, she perceived he had shouldered a spade.

“Gabriel,” said she abruptly, “what's that for ?”

Gabriel muttered something about inquisitiveness, and then said aloud, “I'm going to lend it to Mr. Thomson down the village.”

“A nice time for anybody to borrow anything ; just you make haste, and keep clear of the public-house—do you hear me ?” added she sharply, seeing he was about to unfasten the door.

“Of course I do,” answered he, as he opened the door. As the door opened, a gust of wind sent a few flakes of snow into his face ; “Ugh,” muttered he, suppressing a shiver, “how plaguey cold it is ;” then, stepping out into the cold night air, he shut the door, and proceeded down the road at a rapid rate.

As he trudged along, the white crisp snow crackled beneath his clumsy feet, and the wind, with sudden gusts, would send the falling snow into his face in such quantities as to almost blind him. Now and then, as the wind grew colder, he would draw his coat closer around him, and casting furtive glances at the hedges on either side of him, as though fearful that some goblin or ghost would pounce unawares upon him, considerably quickened his pace.

He had been proceeding at a rapid rate down an almost straight road, when he came to three cross roads ; here he came to a sudden standstill, and stared fixedly before him ; but he soon was himself again—it was only the sign-post !

At the corner of one of these roads stood the village inn already referred to. It was a middle-sized white house, with the sign-post directly in front of it, bearing the inscription of “The Red Herring”—rather suggestive of thirst !

"Shall I step in there before I proceed to business," thought Gabriel, "and get a drain to inspire me?" He couldn't resist the temptation, and in he went.

"Hullo! Gabriel," said the landlord—who possessed the usual corporation and red nose—"thought I should see you to-night. Find it cold?" added he, as Gabriel commenced shaking the snow off his coat. It is evident that the landlord received frequent visits from Mr. Moth, and knew his usual "go," for a glass of steaming hot rum and water was soon ready for his customer.

"Been at work in some garden?" continued the landlord, with a nod in the direction of the spade, as if to intimate why he asked the question.

"No," replied Gabriel, "somebody's always borrowing something or another. Mr. Thomson down the lane has been and asked my wife if I could run down with my spade, and lend it to him this evening; I couldn't refuse, so I'm taking it to him."

"You must be very good-natured to leave a bright, warm fireside on purpose to oblige *him*—he isn't so obliging to other people;" then taking no further notice of the matter, he sat down before the fire, and commenced reading the news. A moment after he looked up, and addressing himself to two men—the only persons besides Gabriel in the bar—asked them if they had heard anything more of their missing master. The men addressed were servants of the squire's, and were dressed in the particular uniform in which all the squire's attendants were attired.

"No," answered one of them, "but a strict enquiry is being made, and we expect to hear something, either bad or good, before the end of the week."

"It's a very strange affair," said the landlord, again subsiding into silence.

Gabriel took no notice of the remarks made, neither of the men who made them—something of more importance (to himself) occupied his mind.

After taking another "go" of rum and bidding the landlord "good night," Gabriel Moth buttoned up his coat, shouldered his spade, and departed. He found upon reaching the outside that it was still snowing fast; but being bent upon some object, it seemed little to affect him now, and taking the turning to the right of the inn which led to the little village railway station, he again set off at a quick pace. The night was intensely cold, and Gabriel, try how he would, could not keep away the many shivers which convulsed his body. It was evident the station was not Gabriel's destination, for after a quarter of an hour's sharp walking he came to a stand-still.

The spot where he had halted was lonely enough. On one side lay a dry uncultivated field, with here and there a barren tree, and the hoarse creaks their shattered boughs gave as the wind swung them to and fro was enough to unman the bravest heart. A low fence divided the road from the field. On the other side was a high hedge dividing a piece of waste ground from the road; in one part of it was a large gap, which had evidently been made in order to obtain

admittance into an old broken-down barn, in the corner of which was a pile of rotten broken sticks, of no use to any one, and it was probably for this reason that no one touched them.

It is now quite time to communicate to the reader the cause of Gabriel's strange conduct. I have already imparted the information that Gabriel was superstitious, and it was through this belief in spirits—I refer now to spirits both liquid and supernatural—that he had been led into the present adventure. On the previous evening he had been imbibing freely at the village inn, and upon his returning home had been put to bed in a helpless state by his ever indulgent spouse. About half-an-hour after his retiring he fancied he saw a spirit at the foot of the bed, who commissioned him in hollow tones to proceed on the following night to the road that led direct from the station to the inn, and there, facing the barn, on the opposite side of the hedge to which it stood, to dig, and he would find a chest of gold! Need I add he was in a drunken dream? Nevertheless Gabriel would impart the news to no one, being not particularly anxious that anyone should enjoy a share of the treasure he felt confident he should find. How mysteriously he set to work we have already seen.

Upon reaching the spot above described, Gabriel immediately set to work. He began by clearing away the snow from a square spot, upon which he decided to commence operations.

Thud! went the spade as it made its first deep incision in the ground. Thud! thud! sounded in quick succession as the spade rapidly cut into the earth, and in the space of about ten minutes a hole measuring about two feet in depth was made. Gabriel paused to wipe the perspiration which, despite the coldness of the atmosphere, had gathered on his brow; the ground upon which he was at work was hard and stony, and necessarily caused him to exert himself a little. It had now ceased snowing, and the moon was shining in all its brilliancy full upon him.

Gabriel was about to recommence digging, when he suddenly desisted, and inclined his ear to the right of him. For a moment all was still, then the sound of footsteps fell indistinctly upon his ear. Some one was approaching from the direction of the inn. It would never do for Gabriel to be found in his present position, nor would it do for signs of a freshly-made hole to meet the gaze of any passer by; he quickly determined to throw the earth loosely in and hide in the hedge till the person or persons approaching had passed the spot; then, hastily filling in the hole, and sprinkling the top of it and the impressions his feet had made with snow, he thrust his spade into the hedge and lay closely under, effectively screening himself from any but a very close observer's gaze.

The footsteps approached nearer and nearer—there was evidently more than one person approaching.

Gabriel drew himself still closer under the hedge, and waited anxiously for the new comers to pass. By the light the moon gave he could now distinctly see two men approaching, and as they neared the spot, recognised them by their attire as two of the miss-

ing squire's servants, then when they came closer saw that they were the very two he had seen at the inn that evening. What could they be doing away from home at this hour? Gabriel asked himself.

At length they were exactly opposite the spot where Gabriel lay hid, and, contrary to his expectations, instead of proceeding further, approached the hedge.

"This is the spot," said one.

"Yes," replied the other, "but don't let us waste time, delays are dangerous."

With these words the two stepped to within a yard of the spot where Gabriel lay, and stepping through the gap, entered the barn. Gabriel wondered what their business could be there; he dared not move, but he could easily watch their movements through a small aperture in the hedge, as the barn door was broken down and the barn itself otherwise dilapidated. The two men approached the corner where the sticks lay and commenced moving them.

"Well," thought Gabriel, "they could easily have stolen the sticks in the daytime, if that's what they wanted."

But by the way they threw them aside, Gabriel saw afterwards that that was *not* what they had come for. They evidently had some deeper motive for being there, and Gabriel began to feel uncomfortable. At length he saw them drag a large mass of something from under the few sticks that remained, and one taking hold of one end of it and one the other, they approached the hedge.

"Good heavens!" Gabriel hoarsely whispered, and with the greatest difficulty suppressed a cry of horror.

They were carrying a dead body!

A fearful thought suddenly came into the head of Gabriel Moth: was it possible that they were the *murderers of their master*, and that this was his body? Gabriel began to tremble violently, but still feared to move, as the villains might have no compunction in killing *him*.

Gabriel was right, the two wretches had indeed murdered the squire for the possession of his money. Slowly and deliberately they placed the body against the hedge, and then, throwing their coats off, commenced digging with two spades which had been hid with the body in the barn. They were at work on the opposite side of the hedge to that on which Gabriel lay, but the state of the hedge allowed him to observe their movements with the greatest ease. The two men had thrown their coats close against the place where Gabriel lay, and while he was watching their cool movements a thought struck him. With as little noise and movement as possible, he drew a large clasp knife from his pocket, and slowly opening the blade, he reached his hand through a hole in the hedge level with the ground and drew the coats towards him. Gabriel had to be extremely cautious, and he took care to make each effort to draw the coats towards him at the same time as the villains' spades struck the ground, and the noise they made sufficiently deadened the slight noise he made. Having succeeded in getting the coats as close to

him as necessary, he cut a button from each, and then quietly pushing them back to their original positions, pocketed the knife and buttons.

In the meantime the men had succeeded in making a hole deep enough to bury the body, and then laying it in, they proceeded to fill up the hole. Gabriel began to wish that they would desist, as he was in a rather peculiar and unpleasant position.

The two men at last finished, and having re-covered the spot with snow, they placed the spades back in the barn, and put their coats on.

"That job's done," said one.

"Quarter to twelve," returned the other, after referring to his watch.

Upon hearing this Gabriel began to entertain serious thoughts as regards the amiability of Mrs. Moth's temper upon his return.

"Come on, we'll be going now, and next week we'll bid good-bye to this cursed place altogether." So saying, the two men trudged off in the direction in which they had come.

Gabriel waited till all sounds of their retiring footsteps had died out, and then, not wishing to remain in the spot longer than he could help, started off in the same direction. He found, as he expected, that Mrs. M. was on the "rampage." However, he managed to calm her down, and then he related to her his adventure, in the course of which he was obliged to acknowledge—though very unwilling to—what took him to the spot. The two determined to visit the deceased squire's residence next day, and then retired to rest.

On the following day Gabriel Moth, accompanied by his better (and bigger) half, presented himself at the squire's house, and asked permission, which was granted, to see the squire's wife upon important business.

Gabriel broke the sad news as gently as he was able, and then, upon her recovering from her first violent fit of grief, told her the whole adventure.

The son was soon acquainted with the affair, and asked what proof Gabriel had against these men, and could he recognise them?

Gabriel said he could do both, and asked mother and son if they would allow all the male servants of the house to be ranged in a row together.

The young squire said that some of them were at present out on errands, &c., but if he called in the evening his wish should be attended to.

As positive proof to the young squire and his mother, the body was exhumed before them, and, in order to prevent suspicion among the servants as to what was about to take place, was taken to Moth's home.

When the evening arrived Gabriel and his wife were punctual to their time at the squire's house, and in due course all the male

servants—twelve in number—were summoned and ranged in a row in the hall. The wife and son of the lamented squire were present, together with the district magistrate.

The young squire then addressed a few words to the servants, telling them the cause of the present set out.

Gabriel, of course, recognised the guilty couple, and could see that immediately the young squire's words fell upon their ears, they were slightly agitated.

As soon as the deceased squire's son had finished his harangue to the servants, he turned to Gabriel, and, warning him that it was a case of life and death, told him to pick out those he accused of the murder of his father from among the rest.

A deathlike silence now pervaded the hall.

Gabriel advanced with a firm step and singled out the pair.

“Tis false,” cried one of them. “Tis false—I swear we are innocent.”

The other remained silent.

All eyes were now turned towards the spot where the accuser and accused stood.

“Now produce your proofs,” said the magistrate.

“I will,” replied Gabriel, and then he asked the young squire to request the two men accused to remove their coats. The men reluctantly obeyed.

“When I was lying beneath the hedge,” resumed Gabriel, “the two men I accuse of the deed took off their coats, and threw them close to where I lay concealed. Having already made up my mind to inform against and accuse them, I felt it necessary to have a substantial proof, and so I cut a button from the breast of each of their coats, and see,” he added, producing the buttons, “here are the buttons, and,” he continued, pointing to the place, “here is where they were cut from!”

The buttons were examined, and found to bear the stamp that the others had.

Four constables who had been in waiting below were now called in, and, having handcuffed the guilty villains, marched them off.

That same evening they made a full confession, and stated that they had murdered the squire as he was going to the station. In course of time they received the full penalty for their crime.

Gabriel was, of course, handed the reward offered—£ 500—“for any particulars that would lead to the conviction of the culprits;” he at first refused, but was soon prevailed upon to take it.

Gabriel and his wife indeed spent a merry Christmas, but amidst their happiness they could not help giving an occasional thought to the state of the dead squire's family.

In conclusion, it may be necessary to state that Gabriel again visited the spot where he was told to dig, this time accompanied by a friend equally as foolish as himself; they dug for about two hours, but they found no money!

THE OLD YEAR AND THE NEW.

BY REBECCA SCOTT.

HE sat one evening on a church-yard wall,
 Warming his gaunt limbs in the sun's last rays,
 And counting, half regretfully, the graves
 Which he had added to the thousands there ;
 When, suddenly, upon his startled ear
 The joyous shouts of childish voices fell :
 "Christmas is coming, and the glad New Year."
 And then the Old Year knew his end was nigh.
 No drivelling greybeard trembling on his staff,
 With palsied limbs, and bleared and haggard eyes,
 And faltering accents of decrepitude,
 Was this Old Year ; but like an aged oak,
 Rugged and gnarled, and seamed with many a scar,
 And grim with time, yet strong and upright still,
 In all the glory of a green old age :
 For still his rough and weather-beaten face
 Bore a rich bloom, like that upon the cheek
 Of winter apple, while his searching eyes,
 With fire undimmed, flashed 'neath his rugged brow ;
 His flowing beard descended to his waist,
 Nut-brown, and sprinkled here and there with white,
 As though a snowball, thrown by urchin's hand
 At the bluff face, had missed its aim, and fallen
 In tiny fragments o'er his ample beard :
 But still, though life was bounding in his veins,
 And every faculty was unimpaired,
 He knew his hours were numbered, and went forth
 Into the streets and byways of the earth,
 To raise his deep stentorian voice in words
 Of solemn warning to the race of man.
 And as he went a gay and laughing band
 Of youths and maidens, laden to the ground
 With evergreens, swept onwards to the church,
 To decorate it for the festival.
 Then in the thoroughfares the Old Year stood,
 To warn the daughters and the sons of men
 How soon they, too, must pass away from earth.
 But some, whose eyes were blinded by the tears
 Which he had made their portion night and day,
 And who the bitter cup he made them drink,
 Even to the dregs, had sickened to the soul,
 Turned from his voice with loathing. Some, and they
 (Alas ! for man's ingratitude) were those
 To whom his best and noblest gifts were given—
 Unmingled happiness, unclouded joys,

Hope's glad fruition—said, with scornful smiles,
 As with disdainful looks they passed him by :
 “What care we for this babbling dotard's words ?
 Haste we to join the gay and festive throng.”
 And then the dance and revelry began,
 And joyous music thrilled the midnight air ;
 And from a thousand belfries burst the peal,
 “A merry Christmas and a glad New Year ;”
 And from a thousand churches swelled the strain—
 The glorious strain, first heard on Bethlehem's plains,
 While humble shepherds kept their flocks by night.

Oh ! for a pencil, dipped in Heaven's own light,
 To paint that wondrous scene at Bethlehem :
 The calm still beauty of an Eastern night ;
 The numerous flocks, some browsing peacefully,
 Some couched upon the soft luxuriant grass ;
 The patient shepherds “seated on the ground,”
 Whiling away the night with glowing tales
 Of Israel's ancient grandeur, ere her sins
 Had given her over to a stranger's rule,
 When from earth's farthest bounds came Sheba's queen,
 To hear the wisdom of King Solomon ;
 And then they told how Israel's minstrel-king,
 While yet a boy, had watched his flocks like them,
 And, earlier still, when God Himself was King,
 And led His people from captivity,
 Forming their pathway through the trackless sea,
 Which, rolling backwards as they passed, engulfed
 Their enemies within her mighty depths ;
 And then they told, in reverential tones,
 How He who dwelt between the cherubim
 Had condescended to converse with man
 From out the glory of the burning bush ;
 And then they wept and murmured, “Ichabod.”
 And then, ere yet the mournful sound had died,
 The light ineffable which shone around,
 When from the star-bespangled dome of heaven
 God's shining messenger of love came down,
 And Heaven's own glory compassed them around,
 The trembling shepherds bowed them to the earth,
 And shook for fear ; while to the wondering ears
 The angel said, “Fear not, for I have brought
 A glorious message unto you this day :
 In David's house, of David's ancient line,
 A Prince, a Saviour, and a Son is born,
 To save His people Israel from their sins ;
 To give them back the glory they have lost.”
 And then the shepherds raised their downcast eyes,
 To see around their radiant visitant

Myriads and myriads of the angelic host :
 Then were Heaven's minstrels heard to sing on earth
 That grand triumphant anthem hymn of praise—
 One glad supernal burst of harmony—
 "Glory to God on high, and peace on earth!"
 Higher and higher swelled the solemn strain ;
 And ere the glorious echo died away,
 Delighted earth pealed forth her loud "Amen."
 Eastward and westward, north and south it rolled,
 From plain to plain ; India's lofty peaks
 In grand reverberation sent it back,
 While distant hills caught up the sweet refrain ;
 From Asia's wilds to Lapland's dreary shore,
 Like one vast sea, increasing as it flowed,
 And ever flowing ; that majestic song,
 A thousand times repeated, ever new,
 To earth's remotest boundaries slowly rolled ;
 And, as the generations passed away
 (Alike endeared to peasant and to peer),
 Became a sweet and sacred heritage,
 From sires to children's children handed down.

Again the music and the dance went on,
 And the gay crowds kept surging to and fro,
 Regardless of the Old Year's agony,
 As loud and long the merry joy bells pealed,
 To ring him out, and ring the New Year in ;
 For many said, "He has abused the power
 Committed to him, having played strange pranks
 Upon the bosom of old mother earth,
 Causing her usually calm breast to heave
 And throb, as with a sharp convulsive pain ;
 Strewing her shores with spars and shattered wrecks,
 And many a sad pale victim of the sea ;
 Scattering with lavish hands in many lands
 The seeds of discord, having even dared
 To lay his impious and presumptuous hands
 Upon the very altars of our God ;
 And so we care not that the tyrant die."

And then the Old Year wept remorseful tears,
 Lifting his voice into a piteous wail.
 But still the gay unpitying crowds surged on,
 And in the joyous revel drowned his moans ;
 And earth—the cold, unsympathising earth—
 Hardening her cruel heart against him, mocked
 The Old Year's misery ; but the pitying sky
 Showered down soft tears upon him, and the sea
 Sobbed forth a sad and solemn requiem :
 And then, upon the smooth and slippery brink

Of a dark river, named Eternity,
 Whose turbid waters wash the shores of time,
 He laid him down, in solitude to die:
 And the fair gentle moon, and silent stars,
 The tear-drops twinkling in their earnest eyes,
 Alone could tell the moment when the tide
 O'erflowed its bank, and swept him to its breast,
 Away for ever from the ken of man.

And still the dance and revelry went on,
 And shouts of welcome on the morning air
 Proclaimed the advent of the New-born Year:
 And the gay revellers crowded round the couch
 On which the happy, smiling babe reposed,
 With songs of joy, pouring with liberal hand
 Their costliest offerings at his baby feet,
 And all unconscious that the unopened scroll
 Grasped in his tiny hand contained a list,
 A long, dark roll, in which the names of some,
 The happiest now, were blurred and stained with tears,
 And in the full, wide margin, crowded close,
 Keen sorrows, blighted hopes, and bitterest woes,
 And trusting love repaid with treachery,
 In large, bold characters, were traced; and some
 Brave youths, with dauntless hearts and honest eyes,
 Eager to battle on the field of life,
 Spurning aside each obstacle which rose
 Upon their pathway till they reached the goal.
 And gentle maidens, on whose lovely cheeks
 The wild rose blossomed; round whose graceful forms
 The soft white robes were floating like a cloud,
 Whose dainty feet ne'er trod the rugged road
 And thorny pathways of this outer world.
 Could they have glanced upon that mystic scroll,
 Had turned aghast, with horror in their eyes,
 To find the stern, unchangeable decree
 Pronounced against them, the death warrant signed
 And sealed by Him, the Lord of life and death,
 From whose dread fiat there is no appeal:
 But still they smiled, for still the scroll remained
 Unopened in the smiling urchin's hand.
 And still the dance and revelry went on,
 And 'mong the gay and laughter-loving throng,
 Only a few, to whom the lapse of time
 Had brought experience, met the "New-born Year"
 With words of sober welcome, murmuring low
 A solemn prayer, as on his untried brow
 They laid their loving hands, "that God would grant
 His grace, to keep them in the path of right,
 In all their journeyings with the New-born Year;"

That when the time shall come when he must pass
Into the river of Eternity,
He may bear with him, to the unknown land,
A nobler record than the year that's gone.

MR. BRISKEAR'S MISTAKE.

By G. NASH.

IN a certain town, to which I shall give no name, for were I to call it Dudlow, Vaneham, Batham, or any other such name, you would know in a moment that it was only fictitious, and would be as far off as ever from knowing which town was meant. Therefore, beginning as before, I state that in a certain town there was a very narrow, dull street, where the houses on each side stood staring one another out of countenance the whole of the day; where on the window-sills the servant girls would rest their great, red, bare arms, and talk familiarly across to each other about different events which had transpired since their last meeting, and their various successes or failures in winning the hearts of Harry, Bob, Tom, &c. About half way down this street lived a hairdresser, and by whichever way you approached his shop, your eye would be attracted by the pole protruding from the door, and reaching nearly to the opposite side of the street; the next thing that you would perceive would probably be a rather long and rather red nose, with other features necessary to make up a perfect countenance, surmounted by a shock of black hair. This head, apparently suspended from the doorway, like Professor Pepper's *tête décapitée*, with no sign of a body, belonged to the proprietor of this hair-cutting and shaving establishment. He thus stood whenever he was not otherwise engaged, with his body in the shop and his head hanging out, in the manner I have described.

A most curious man was this Mr. Silas Briskear—an exceedingly curious man. He seemed to have been brought into the world for the sole purpose of watching the business of other people. Not a single thing escaped his notice—not a window could be raised, not a door could be slammed, without his knowing who looked out of the one and who went in or out of the other. He knew the history of every person in the place, from No. 1, to the last house. That is, he could tell you all their faults, for Mr. Briskear would never believe in anybody possessing good qualities, excepting himself.

On one particular afternoon, Mr. Briskear was sitting in a chair close to the door of his shop, attentively reading his newspaper. Now, of course, no one would doubt for a moment, by my saying *his newspaper*; that he had stepped two doors above and purchased

it of his neighbour; but no, he had not. When Mr. Briskear was a little boy he went to school (as little boys generally do), and one of the copies he wrote at that period got so indelibly fixed on his mind that he could never efface it. It was that one in which we are told, "A penny saved is a penny gained." Mr. Briskear put this maxim into use on every possible occasion, and if by fair or any other means he could borrow anything, he was never foolish enough to buy it. Mr. Briskear thought himself a very sharp man. Well, Mr. Briskear sat in the shop reading the paper. He read for some time very quietly, when suddenly he let the paper fall, jumped up, clapped his hands, and rubbing them together, skipped about the floor; yes, actually skipped. Lucky it was for him that no one came in the shop while he was thus giving vent to his excited feelings, or he would most certainly have been put down as insane.

"I'll be hanged," he exclaimed aloud, "if they are not the right ones. Let's see." Here he took up the paper again. "This robbery took place a week ago—yes. And then, about four days ago, a suspicious-looking couple (as I remarked at the time) took the lodgings next door—yes. They go out at very odd times; they come in at very odd times, and they slink along as if somebody was always following them. Ah, ah, my dears! I think I have you save enough. Bless my heart, £10 reward. Ten pounds will come in very handy indeed. It will be the making of me. Why, Silas (this confidently to himself), you ought to have been a detective officer; you are cut out for it most decidedly."

Here he rubbed his hands together again, and would no doubt have indulged in another caper had he not been disturbed by the entrance of a very large, fierce-looking man, with an exceedingly red face, most luxuriantly covered with pimples, who—sitting down in the chair with such force that it trembled under him—told Silas to shave him, and to be quick about it, as he was in a hurry.

Silas immediately went through his usual mechanical process of arranging the white cloth round the customer's neck, and then began daubing his chin and lips with a plentiful supply of lather. But at the very first touch of the brush the man jumped up as though he had been shot.

"Confound the fellow," he cried, "do you want to skin me alive? don't you know that your lather is burning hot?"

"Dear, dear," said Silas, "I am very sorry, extremely sorry, I would not have done it for the world; I had not the slightest idea it was so hot."

"Not know it was so hot! and yet you could see that it was boiling on the fire like a kettle. But don't stand there, man, like a fool, didn't I tell you I was in a hurry?"

Silas then proceeded with his work; but, try as he would, he could not get the thoughts of that £10 out of his mind. The consequence was, that in a fit of abstraction as to what he should do with the money, he shaved off very neatly five or six of the pimples

from the person's face. He didn't perceive it, however, until he felt himself seized in an iron grip, and roughly shaken.

"So this is a specimen of your shaving, is it? This is how you treat your customers. I'll take good care you don't shave me again while I am here. Why, confound the fellow, it might prove dangerous. If I *do* feel the slightest effects, you shall pay for it, mark my words. A pretty fellow to call himself a barber! I should advise you to hang yourself at the end of your pole outside; it would be about the best thing you could do."

With these words the angry man, after wiping off the soap that was still on his chin, strode indignantly out of the shop.

Silas felt himself so much upset at this unexpected adventure, that he shut his shop a full half-hour before the usual time. He then proceeded to get his supper—for Silas was a bachelor, you must understand. This meal finished, he then comfortably seated himself in a corner of his stair window, from which he could command a view of the whole street. He sat thus smoking his pipe for about half-an-hour, occasionally drinking out of a glass by his side—probably containing water, and something stronger with it.

At last he perceived the individuals whom he was watching for coming slowly up the street. They were a man and his wife—two poor, emaciated-looking creatures, their clothes hanging in rags on their thin, shrunken forms.

Mr. Briskear saw them safely inside their door, then pocketing his paper, and putting on his hat, he went in all haste to the police-station, and was soon in earnest talk with the inspector, who, after having been shown the paper containing the account of the robbery, and being assured that he should soon have the guilty parties safely in custody, agreed that a couple of policemen should accompany Silas to their house. Proud as he is at all times, Silas seems ten times as proud on the present occasion, and walks along with the air of a magistrate.

At length they reached the house in which the suspected couple lived. Silas advanced, and began a thundering cannonade with the knocker. A suspicious shuffling was heard inside, and it was not until the door threatened to give way under the blows showered upon it, that it was opened, and a haggard-looking face thrust out, which demanded in a gruff voice, "What the devil they wanted?"

"Why we want you, my man," said Silas. "Don't be alarmed."

He thereupon called up the two policemen who, at the demand of Silas, took the poor fellow and his wife into custody, both of them vehemently protesting that they had done nothing, and didn't deserve such treatment.

Silas chuckled to himself, and held his head a great deal higher as he walked back to the police-station, for quite a crowd of neighbours had by this time collected together, asking him question after question as they pressed round him.

At last they reach the station. The door is slammed together. Silas and the two prisoners being inside with one of the policemen, the other stays outside to disperse the crowd. The magistrates

are not sitting, of course, it being late in the day; so the prisoners must wait till the morning. Therefore, after the usual forms are gone through, they are conveyed to the cell, still averring their innocence of any charge laid against them, and abusing Mr. Briskear in no very measured terms.

I will not give the details of next day's proceedings, as they would unnecessarily prolong this short sketch. I will then simply say that the next morning Mr. Briskear, dressed in his best, proceeded to the court. The prisoners were brought in, and Silas began showing his reason why he thought they had committed the robbery. He was surprised to find that it did not appear half so clear and conclusive as when the thought had first seized him in his shop. Evidently the magistrates were thinking the same, by the grave manner in which they shook their wise-looking heads. Just at this point the man leaned forward and asked if they would allow him to send for a person who would soon put matters all straight. The request was granted. A messenger was sent, who soon returned, followed, to Mr. Briskear's horror, by the red-faced man he had shaved the day before.

It would be impossible to describe the rage and disappointment of Silas, when he heard that Jakes and his wife worked for Mr. Lympard, the red-faced man, who was proprietor of a travelling circus, and that four days ago they had come twenty miles from the very opposite direction to where the robbery had taken place. This was of course perfectly conclusive, and the man and his wife were discharged from custody. It would be impossible to describe the indignation of Silas at the ridicule which Mr. Lympard showered upon him, and at which the magistrates and policemen almost choked themselves with laughter.

At last, unable to bear it any longer, he rushed from the court, but the people outside no sooner saw him than they commenced a most melodious concert of hisses, groans, and other noises peculiar to an enraged mob. Then, headed by Jakes and his wife, they escorted him home. By way of extra amusement, they also made targets of his hat and coat, discharging anything they could lay their hands on against these unoffending articles of attire. You can imagine in what dismal plight poor Silas reached his house. What trouble he had before he could find the key, and then a greater trouble to put it in the lock, in consequence of his hat being playfully knocked over his eyes. He finds it, however, at last. He opens the door, rushes in, and bolts it after him. He is safe!

It was a long time before Mr. Briskear again ventured out of his shop. It was a long time before his head was again seen hanging in the doorway. But time, which deals leniently with all things, buried this adventure of his in oblivion, and Silas now pursues his avocation as of yore. When, at any time, it is referred to by a customer, he only shakes his head, and says, "Ah! my dear sir, the wisest people sometimes make mistakes; I made one then, which will be a warning to me never to set up as a private detective any more."

COURAGE.

BY JOHN SCOTT.

MEN surely cannot life enjoy
 Whose souls red gold bewitches ;
 Far happier is the peasant boy
 Without estates or riches.
 What matters wealth, if we have health,
 And able hands to win it ?
 The task is light, if in our might
 We manfully begin it.

The toper lauds the flowing bowl ;
 Does it deserve his praises ?
 It ruins mind, destroys the soul,
 Through all life's varied phases.
 The lover sighs about blue eyes,
 Till all his schemes miscarry—
First let him learn support to earn,
 And *then* his sweetheart marry.

Hast heard the tale, how Robert Bruce
 Watched in the lowly *shieling*
 The spider's efforts to educe
 His web across the ceiling ?
 Six times he tried, but Fate denied
 The boon the insect needed ;
 He tried again, and not in vain,
 The *seventh* time he succeeded !

So Robert Bruce began to cheer,
 Though oft at first retarded :
 A long and prosperous career
 His struggles well rewarded.
 We learn from Bruce, it is no use
 In life to be down-hearted,
 For we *must* win, if we begin
 Again from where we started.

As life's dark evening shadows fall,
 And cares are nearly ended,
 What use has wealth been after all
 If 'twas not well expended ?
 Then let us strive, while we survive,
 And fortune's smiles are wooing,
 Our surplus store of golden ore
 To spend upon well-doing.

THE FATE OF LEONARD SINCLAIR.

By ALFRED SKINSLEY,

Author of "*The School Friends*," etc.

"You have often asked me, Cissy," said a lady named Miss Henrique to her neice, "why your aunt Lavinia has never married. I will now tell you.

"As you know, darling, we are three daughters of a clergyman, who resided here at Pangwell until his death; we had but one brother, your poor papa, who was at college when the events occurred, which I am about to narrate.

"We were brought up quietly, seeking but little of the limited society which this place affords. It is not a visiting place—lovers of solitude resort here, and, I dare say, if it were possible to unravel the secrets of those who have resided here, many a stirring story of past adventures could be told.

"Papa was kind to us, and such a thing as a dissentient voice was never heard in our home. Sometimes we could not help pining for a little society. We were young, and had the restless longing of youth to know more of the world than we saw around us.

"Harry, your papa, came home for his first vacation and brought a friend with him, Leonard Sinclair, a tall handsome young fellow, with the most winning ways and noblest heart in the world.

"He came like a bright ray of sunshine upon our quiet home, and a hearty welcome we gave him. He paid great attention to us all; but there was something in his manner to Lavvy which told us that she was his favourite, and, of course we concluded that he loved her. I know she loved him dearly; how could it be otherwise, for Martha and myself liked him, too, well; but when we found how the affair was going, we gave them many opportunities of being together.

"Harry returned to college, but his friend, who was very rich, declared himself tired of 'schooling,' and purchased a small house, our own Myrtle Lodge, for an occasional residence here.

"Such a sign as this could receive but one interpretation from us; and it proved correct, for shortly after his establishing a house here, he made a formal proposal to papa for Lavvy's hand.

"No obstacle was thrown in his path, for we all loved him dearly, and that day three months was appointed for the wedding.

"What a happy time followed! excursions by sea, and picnics on land. Leonard sang delightfully, and amused us with imitations of singers in foreign lands.

"Martha and I allowed no selfish love-making, for we declared that they would soon have enough of that, so we were always of the party wherever they went.

"Two miles inland lies a charming wood, where secluded little nooks delight the pleasure-seeker, where flowers and wild fruit abound; and thither we often went for a day's outing.

"Lavvy was always fond of flowers, and regularly Leonard would

be away early in the morning to gather her a posy, with which he duly presented himself at the breakfast table.

"We often smiled at this, and asked him how long he would continue to do so after his marriage.

"I shall continue it" he said, "up to my wedding morn; and then it will cease, unless we go together."

"Three months was not long to wait, and it soon passed. The day before the wedding arrived. It was to be a very quiet affair, and Harry, who was busy 'cramming for his little go,' as he termed it, did not come down.

"We were all excitement, of course; dresses were tried on, for, however plain they were to be, a perfect fit was necessary to do credit to the ceremony.

"Leonard strolled in with his flowers a little later than usual, and Lavvy asked him smilingly if they had not better be the last.

"No," he replied, "I made a promise in the presence of all here that I would, until my wedding morn, perform my pilgrimage to the wood, and bring the flowers to my love, and I'll keep my word."

"Papa said it was perfectly right to keep his word, but it was not a very serious matter if he failed upon this occasion.

"By-the-bye," said Leonard, after a moment's silence, "have you any smugglers about here?"

"I believe they occasionally select this spot for a run," replied papa. "Why do you ask?"

"I saw one or two very ugly-looking fellows as I came along this morning. Their manner was very suspicious and their appearance bulky; but not being a custom-house officer I did not venture to detain them."

"Better not," replied papa; an opinion in which we all coincided, Lavvy especially.

No more was thought of this conversation at the time, and we proceeded with the preparations.

The morrow came; dark lowering clouds hung in the sky, threatening rain. By nine o'clock it came down heavily, and we unanimously agreed that on such a morning Leonard would not attempt to procure wild flowers; and sure enough he did not bring them. The church, as you know, dear, is near Myrtle Lodge, and we at once concluded he would walk to the church and meet us there. Papa expected a message—but none came.

"Strange," he said, "Leonard is not wont to be so neglectful; but come, my dears, we will away to church—we shall be sure to find him *there*."

A brother clergyman of papa's had been secured to officiate, and we, nothing doubting of Leonard's being at the church, stepped into the carriage and were driven there.

"But no Leonard was visible! Papa's brow darkened, and our hearts sank within us.

We waited for a time, but he came not; and at last a messenger was despatched to Myrtle Lodge, to know the cause of his absence.

"The man came back with a scared face, and declared that Mr. Leonard Sinclair had not been home since the previous day, and the servant of the house assumed he had passed the night at ours.

"Poor Lavvy's face blanched, and anger spread over our father's countenance. We—knowing not what to think—could only tremble and stand silent.

"Can he have trifled with us?" cried papa. "Come home, my children, and I will learn the cause of the absence of this man."

"Enquiries were made. Some said they had seen him on the road, going towards a distant station; others were almost certain they had seen him put out in a small boat to sea; and one man, returning from a distant market town, was convinced he had seen him there.

"Papa communicated with his friends; but the only answer he received was to the effect that Mr. Leonard Sinclair had never shown himself particularly interested in the welfare of his friends, and they were too much engaged just now to trouble themselves about him.

"What could we think, except that Lavvy had been cruelly trifled with by a thoughtless man?"

"The wedding dresses were laid sorrowfully aside; the mourning of the heart was in our house, and by one consent his name was to be uttered no more.

"Five days passed, a time of silent sorrow to all within our home.

"Harry, to whom we had written on the subject, had returned an answer declaring such conduct on the part of his friend was impossible.

"In all his transactions," the letter said, "he has always shown himself a scrupulously honourable man, no moral taint of the smallest nature rests upon his character. Some great mystery lies in his disappearance, and I, who have known him so long, and love him so dearly, will not entertain the interpretation you have put upon his absence. Pray take further steps to ascertain what has become of him. If needful, I will throw up my studies, and return home to fathom this mystery."

"Time passed on to the evening of the sixth day. We were sitting round the fire, exchanging a few remarks upon various topics, but our words fell flat, for the thoughts of all were far away."

"It would be impossible for me, Cissy, to describe the change in our poor home; but in a few words I will attempt to give a brief outline of the wreck our disappointment made.

"Lavvy, so handsome and merry, was pale, dejected, and silent, but shed no tears; a grief too deep for ordinary vent was wringing her affectionate heart. All she did was done in a listless, vague manner, as if the soul had left the body which now moved mechanically to and fro.

"Papa was stern and angered. Foul play he would not think of for a moment—such a thing had never been heard of in quiet Pangwell; but the pain he suffered most was to see his darling

daughter Lavvy—our pet and his—wrecked by the loss of her love.

“Martha and I endeavoured to show our grief as little as possible; we felt it to be our duty to sustain Lavvy in the hour of trial, and exerted ourselves to the utmost to do so.

“I was wondering how long this suffering was to last, when the modest knock of one of our humble neighbours was heard at the door. I opened it, and there stood Burt, the gardener, whose pallor could not be hidden by his sunburnt skin.

“‘Is t’ parson in?’ he asked.

“Replying in the affirmative, I made him step in, and summoned papa. The words that were uttered I could not hear; but I heard a stifled moan, and then papa’s heavy tread as he ascended the stairs to his room above.

“In a few moments he returned, and left the house with Burt. Two hours later he came back; his hands trembled, and he looked like a man who had received a shock that would go with him through life.

“‘Lavvy, dear,’ he said, ‘will you not retire to rest?’

“‘Without Martha and Charlotte?’ she asked.

“‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘you are the youngest, and late events have much depressed you; go, my darling.’

“For some minutes after she was gone, he sat clasping his head with his hands, rocking himself to and fro.

“At length he ceased, and looking up, with his eyes full of tears, said, ‘My children, Leonard is found!’

“Something in his face warned us not to speak, and he, after rocking himself again, said, ‘Yes, found! My God! how unjust I have been! What bitter words I have uttered, and what bitter thoughts I have encouraged! Yes, my children, he is found!’

“‘Where?’ we asked.

“‘In yonder wood,’ he replied.

“A terrible thought passed through our brains, but we could give it no utterance.

“‘Yes, in yonder wood,’ he continued, ‘cut off in the blossom of his life, taken from a prospect of early happiness, removed by violent hands from those who loved him well, cruelly robbed and murdered!’

“‘Murdered!’ we repeated.

“The next moment the door was thrown open, and poor Lavvy stood before us.

“‘Murdered!’ she cried. ‘Who could do so vile a deed? What monster had the heart to rob my husband of his life? He was good and kind to all. Take me to him,—show me the man who did this deed!’

“Her passion and agony were fearful, but no tears came to her relief.

“‘What is the world without him to me?’ she continued; ‘my heart, my life, my soul, was his; lead me to where he lies.’

“‘You cannot go to-night, dear,’ we said soothingly to her.

"‘I must,’ she said, firmly. ‘I cannot rest until I have seen him. Who did the deed?’

“‘It is not yet known,’ replied papa.

“‘No matter,’ she said, ‘I will search him out. Once more, will you show me my murdered love? No! Then I go to seek him.’

“She turned towards the door, but ere she reached it, fell senseless to the ground.

“For many months Lavvy lay ill, hovering between life and death; but at length she was restored to good health. Her mind for many years gave us cause for anxiety; but now time has done its work, and Lavvy, as far as bodily health is concerned, is the same dear sister as before.

“On the morrow we learned the story: Poor Leonard had gone to the wood in the evening to cull the flowers, instead of doing so on the following morning.

“This was made clear by his open knife being found, with a bunch of withered flowers, near the spot where his body was discovered.

“A fearful struggle had taken place—the turf was literally trodden to pieces, and shreds of clothing were scattered around.

“He died from a cruel stab in the back; it was therefore evident he had been attacked by more than one.

“Plunder was undoubtedly the object of the crime; his jewellery, perchance, attracted the attention of some smuggling ruffians who were hovering near the wood, and, when they robbed, murdered, to hide the deed.

“The culprits were never really known; but two men, who were arrested a few miles from here for a terrible crime, committed a year after, were supposed to know all about the deed; indeed, one—in a moment of half repentance—said he could tell if he wished; but he was a hardened wretch, and died without giving further sign.

“Leonard, strange to say, had a few days before his death, willed his property to his wife in her maiden name, and that is how we came to be possessed of our present home.

“This, my dear Cissy, is the history of Lavvy’s love, and I need not tell you that we seldom mention anything concerning

“THE FATE OF LEONARD SINCLAIR.”

B U M P K I N .

AN ACTING CHARADE IN THREE ACTS.*

BY STANLEY MARTIN.

CHARACTERS.

Mr. BALDWIN, aged about fifty.

GEORGE, his son, aged twenty-two.

GILES MUDMARSH, a country bumpkin.

NELLY RAY, a young governess, cousin to GILES.

JEMIMA, cook and general servant.

COSTUMES.

Mr. BALDWIN.—Dark square-cut coat, dark trousers, white vest, bunch of seals, &c. Grey wig, partially bald.

GEORGE.—Respectable modern attire.

GILES.—Velveteen coat and vest, pearl buttons, corderoy or fustian trousers, russet leggings, highlows, soft felt hat, bundle, &c.

NELLY.—Neat dark dress, &c.

JEMIMA.—Cotton print dress, apron, cap, &c.

ACT I.—BUMP.

SCENE.—*Room in Mr. BALDWIN'S house. Doors R., L., and C. flat. Pianoforte R. of C. door. Table and book-case against wall behind, L. of C. door. Chairs, &c. Busts, pictures, and books. Mr. BALDWIN and GEORGE discovered seated at table L. C.*

Mr. BALDWIN. Yes, yes ; I know you youngsters despise worldly dross, as you call it ; but George, my son, there is a great defect in the formation of your head. You are very deficient in caution. Now, consider—

GEORGE. I have considered, father. I love Nelly dearly ; and all the learning of all the phrenologists in the world could not alter my determination.

BAL. There you evince another great fault—lack of veneration. My dear boy, consider the configuration of your head, and act accordingly. Miss Ray—Nelly, as you call her—is a pretty girl, I'll own—

GEO. No one can deny that !

BAL. But so are thousands of others. She's amiable and accomplished ; so are thousands of others, too. But, George, my

* This piece may be played by amateurs as a one-act farce, under the title of "A Country Cousin," it being so written that the divisions between the acts may, in such a case, be altogether disregarded. JEMIMA may be personated by a young gentleman, suitably got up, but it is imperative that NELLY should be represented by a lady.

boy, she's only a governess; she earns her livelihood by instructing your younger sisters, consequently she's poor—

GEO. Yes, and so are thousands of others.

BAL. Don't interrupt, George—she's poor, as I said before. Then we know nothing of her connections or antecedents. We can trace back our family pedigree to Baldwin the Burly, who came over with the Conqueror. Ten to one she doesn't know who her great grandfather was.

GEO. But I don't want to marry her great grandfather!

BAL. Silence, George! Then supposing I consented to this preposterous match, how are you going to support a wife, I should like to know?

GEO. I humbly hope that by means of my pen—

BAL. Your pen! Nonsense, George. You'll never make your salt as an author. Haven't you written poetry enough to sink a ship, and did you ever earn as much by it as would pay you for the paper you have covered?

GEO. But I have been trying my wings in a different flight. I have written a novel.

BAL. George, if you expect to be able to support a wife by writing stories for servant maids, you're a greater idiot than I thought you were.

GEO. I don't know what to expect yet. I am anxiously awaiting a verdict on my production, which, I assure you, is not of that exciting class which Jemima, the cook, is always reading in the "Halfpenny Horrifier," or some such trashy weekly print.

BAL. I should hope not. That girl reads rubbish till she thinks about nothing short of murder, suicide, or bigamy. But I wish you'd give up this scribbling, George. It's sheer waste of time. All the novels you'll ever write won't, to use a vulgar expression, keep the pot boiling, unless you put 'em under it on the fire. Ha, ha, ha! But, seriously speaking, I have another argument against Miss Ray—an unanswerable one. Although to all appearance she behaves with propriety and rectitude, phrenologically speaking, we know nothing of her character, for she wears her hair, or someone else's—

GEO. It's all her own, I'll swear.

BAL. Well, then, she wears her hair in such a manner as to render it impossible for one to obtain any idea as to the real conformation of her head.

GEO. Oh, father, her head's all right—

BAL. You don't know that, boy; I'm very doubtful, for when I asked her as a *special* favour to conduce to the success of my studies by having her head shaved, she actually refused.

GEO. (*Rising angrily*). I should think so, indeed! All that beautiful hair—shaved! Ridiculous! I'm deaf to your arguments after that.

BAL. But, my dear boy, don't be precipitate. Consider you're going to take a penniless wife, without any visible means of supporting her, and also without any certainty as to her real qualities.

Why, I wouldn't engage a servant without first examining his cranium.

GEO. Yes, and much good it does. Didn't you examine the cook's cranium, as you call it, and was there ever a more careless, forgetful servant in the world?

BAL. I know she's deficient in order, George. I knew that at the time. Her shortness of memory is altogether owing to her constant reading of novels. If I could break her of that, she'd be a good servant. But, talking of servants, it's strange I haven't yet had an application for the vacant butler's place. Did you see the advertisement, George?

GEO. Yes, I saw it. The prospect didn't appear very inviting, as I thought. If I remember right, you advertised for a butler who was to work in the garden, attend to the horses, and drive the carriage occasionally.

BAL. Yes, that was the way I worded it. (*Knock, L.*) Come in.

Enter JEMIMA, R. I. E., with a letter in one hand and a nutmeg grater in the other.

JEMIMA. Please, sir, here's a letter for you, please, sir.

BAL. A letter! (*Takes it.*) Dear me, it's long after post time. I suppose it came at the usual time this morning, and you forgot to deliver it?

JEM. No, sir, please.

BAL. Well, how then?

JEM. Please, sir, the postman left it yesterday morning when was grinding the coffee, and I put it into the top of the coffee-mill, like this (*puts nutmeg grater into Mr. BALDWIN's hat, which is on the table*), and I forgot it, if you please, sir.

BAL. Tut, tut, tut! How very forgetful! You must be more careful, really, Jemima. You never knew me to mislay things in this way.

JEM. No, sir.

Exit, R. I. E.

BAL. (*Feeling his pockets.*) Dear me, where are my spectacles? How extraordinary! I had them this morning, where can they be? (*Looks about.*) Oh, I think I left them in my dressing-room.

Exit with letter, L. U. E.

GEO. (*Looking after him.*) Poor old governor! How unlucky I caught him in one of his worldly-wise humours this morning. Now if I could only put him into a happy, jolly, genial state of mind, he'd consent to our marriage without any demur. How can I do it? Let me think.

Enter JEMIMA, R. I. E., with a large carving knife in her hand.

JEM. (*Looking about.*) Please, sir, did you see nothing of a nutmeg grater nowhere?

GEO. (*Aside.*) Ha! The cook! An idea! Just the thing! (*Aloud.*) Here, Jemima, I want to speak to you.

JEM. Speak to me, sir?

GEO. Yes, Jemima. The fact is, my father and I don't quite agree on a particular topic; he doesn't see the thing from my point of view.

JEM. No, sir.

GEO. And, you know, the nearest way to a man's heart is through his stomach, so—

JEM. Oh, you wretch ! you want me to stick him. (*Draws herself up, and crosses stage.*) Know, then, base caitiff, I scorn the haction. (*Flings down carving knife.*)

GEO. (*Aside.*) Ye powers, she's read halfpenny weeklies till she's got murder on the brain. (*Aloud.*) What a ridiculous idea ! You're altogether wrong, Jemima. Of course I don't want you to stick him, as you call it ; quite the reverse. I want you to make him a very nice dinner.

JEM. Oh, you wretch ! you wants me to pison him !

GEO. No, no, no ! Don't be absurd. I want you to put him into a jolly good humour. You know the dish that suits him best—that sort of pudding you gave him when you wanted your wages raised last quarter. (*Approaches JEMIMA.*) I want you to make that for dinner to-day.

Enter NELLY, with book, c. door ; she starts.

Here's something for your trouble. (*Gives money.*) You'll do it, won't you ? (*Aside.*) I must flatter her a bit, and then she will. (*Aloud.*) You're a pretty girl, Jemima. (*Pats her under the chin.*)

JEM. La, sir !

NEL. (*Aside.*) I won't be jealous, it's absurd. But what does George mean by talking in this way to that odious creature ?

GEO. Yes, as I said before, you're remarkably pretty, Jemima. A kiss from such pretty lips must be exquisite. (*Seizes JEMIMA, and is about to kiss her, when NELLY coughs loudly ; they start asunder.*) Nelly, dear, I didn't know you were here !

NEL. I should think not ! But don't think I care. Keep away from me, George Baldwin, you, yo— yo— (*sobbing*) you're a despicable, deceitful wretch—there ! *Exit, hastily, c. door.*

GEO. What does she mean ? Ah, the green-eyed monster ! I'll soon put that right. *Exit, c. door.*

JEM. It's no green-eyed monster. She's jealous, that's what she is—and well she may be, too, for I believe he's took a fancy to me. And why not, I should like to know ? He says, says he, "You're a pretty girl, Jemima," and then he chuck me under the chin, and wants to give me a kiss—them's sure signs. Won't I give my slow old flame, Giles Mudmarsh, the cold shoulder when he comes, that's all. *Exit, R. I. E.*

Enter NELLY, c. door, with book, which she puts in book-case.

NEL. (*Smiling.*) How silly I was to feel annoyed. Of course it was all nonsense, as George said. But then he ought to know I don't like such nonsense—with other girls. Now where's that sheet of music ? (*Looks on table.*)

Enter Mr. BALDWIN, L. U. E., with letter.

BAL. It's remarkably strange, I can't find those spectacles any-

where. Ah, Miss Ray, you have young eyes, would you oblige me by reading this letter?

NEL. Oh, certainly. (*Opens letter, and reads.*)

“Respectful sur,

“I sit down to take up my pen to write these few lines, hoping they will find you quite well, as it leaves me at present.” (*Looks up.*) Dear me, how very funny!

BAL. Go on, that's the introduction. I suppose it's an application for the butler's place.

NEL. (*Reads.*) “Leaves me at present. Will come to see about the place to-morrow.

“Yours respectfully,

“GILES (*starts*) yes, GILES MUDMARSH.”

BAL. To-morrow! He'll be here to-day, the letter has been delayed. (*Noise as of a barrel-organ in the street.* Mr. BALDWIN runs to window, R.) Hollo! an organ, and a monkey, too! That's lucky, indeed. I particularly want to examine a living monkey's skull, Miss Ray, to enable me to refute Darwin's theory. The organ-man will allow me to do so for a small fee, I've no doubt. Where's my hat? (*Puts on his hat.*) Dear me, what's that? (*Takes hat off, and nutmeg grater falls out.*) A nutmeg grater! More of that cook's carelessness. I'll scold her when I come back.

Exit, R. I. E.

NEL. (*Still holding letter.*) Giles Mudmarsh! How very unlucky! My great, good-natured, awkward, boorish, country cousin Giles. How provoking! Coming to take a common servant's place here! (*Looks out of window, R.*) I declare he's coming up the street now, with a bundle under his arm! (*Knocks heard.*) He's knocking at the door! What shall I do? I'll contrive to see him alone, if I can. Goodness, gracious! the cook's showing him upstairs. (*Footsteps.*) He mustn't see me in her presence, or he'll divulge our relationship at once.

Exit, C. door.

Enter JEMIMA, showing in GILES, R. I. E.

JEM. (*Who has a large ladle in her hand.*) There, sit down, and wait till master comes. I dare say he'll be here in half an hour. (*Going.*)

GILES. What? You ain't going to leave a feller here, after comin' all this way to see thee?

JEM. I ha' my work to look after, Mr. Mudmarsh; besides, it warn't me you come to see. Yo' come to take butler's place, didn't you?

GILES. What d'ye mean? Didn't I come to take place cos I'd be near thee, lass, so as we could save both our wages, an' get wed, eh?

JEM. Lor, Giles, how green yo' be! Why, don't think I ha' thee, man, when I can get a real gentleman any day by crookin' my little finger.

GILES. (*Angrily.*) Crook thy little fingers, then, and thy thumbs

too. I wish I'd never seen thy face, an' then I wouldn't ha' left a good gamekeeper's place to come on sich an arrand as this.

JEM. Go back again, then, if thou likes it better.

GILES. Yo' never mean it, Jemima. You're just seeing what stuff I'm made o'. (*Approaches her.*) Come, lass, let's ha' a kiss, an' make it up, as we done many a time afore.

JEM. I do mean't; stand off!

GILES. Come, lass, don't be savage. I see thou's only pertendin'. Lets ha' a smack.

JEM. (*Hits him smartly on head with ladle.*) There's a smack, then. (*Runs off R. I. E.*)

GILES. (*Rubbing his head.*) Oh, confound her! There's no pertendin' about that. Why, there's a hill risin' on my head like a mole-heap in a meadow, on'y not quite so big. What a vixen that lass be! (*Looks off R.*) Hollo! What's this old chap mean? Bodikins! He's pullin' faces, and dancing a jig with his finger in his mouth. He's comin' here. Maybe he's mad. I'd better stand out o's way. (*Retires to back.*)

Enter Mr. BALDWIN, R. I. E.

BAL. (*Pacing backwards and forwards, hurriedly.*) Oh, that abominable monkey! The moment I came to terms with its diabolical owner, and began to pass my hands over its skull, the infernal little imp nearly bit my finger off. Oh! (*Wraps finger in handkerchief and paces stage.*)

GILES. I mun stop this, or he'll wear a hole through th' carpet. (*Steps suddenly before BALDWIN—collision.*)

BAL. Hollo! Who are you, and what do you mean by coming bump against me like that?

GILES. I come to see about t' butler's place. You're Squire, I s'pose. You'd get a letter from me, sayin'—

BAL. Oh, yes, I got a letter, Mr.— I forget your name.

GILES. My name's Giles Mudmarsh, and I ain't 'shamed on it.

BAL. (*Aside.*) A strange uncouth being. (*Aloud.*) Well, and what are your qualifications?

GILES. Eh?

BAL. I mean, what can you do?

GILES. Oh, what can I do? Why, I can snare a hare wi' any man in t' county; and I'll run, jump, wrestle, or feight any man i' England, o' t' same weight an' age.

BAL. But you came to take a butler's place, and—ah—assist at other little jobs. Do you know anything of a butler's duties?

GILES. Not I, but I'se willin' to learn, mister.

BAL. Indeed. You'll scarcely suit me, I'm afraid. As to character? Have you brought any recommendations?

GILES. No, I didn't. (*Turns up cuffs, threateningly.*) You got nothin' to say agin my character, have you, mister?

BAL. Oh, dear me, no! (*Aside.*) What a remarkable being! I must examine his head, at any rate. (*Aloud.*) There's another thing. I'm what people call a phrenologist.

GILES. A what ?

BAL. A phrenologist.

GILES. Oh ! (Aside.) I thought there was something queer about him.

BAL. And, consequently, I never engage a servant without first feeling his head. Will you sit down here ? (Sets chair, c.)

GILES. What for ?

BAL. As I told you, I want to feel your head.

GILES. (Aside.) I wish he'd felt my head 'stead o' me, when Jemima hit it such a crack just now. (Aloud.) Well, as you seem set on it, you may feel my head if you like. (Aside.) It's maybe as well to humour him. (Sits, c. Aloud.) But no nonsense, mister. No tricks on travellers, you know.

BAL. (Examining head.) H'm ! Combativeness large, as I thought ; philoprogenitiveness small ; veneration—(Starts.) Bless my life, what an extraordinary bump just here ! What an abnormal protuberance ! I wonder what organ it represents ?

GILES. Organ ! I ain't got no organs in my head ; if there be, you'd best look out, or the monkey'll perhaps bite your finger. He ! he ! he !

BAL. (Abstractedly.) Very extraordinary. (Still feeling head.)

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.—KIN.

SCENE.—*Characters and attitudes same as in termination of the previous act.*

MR. BALDWIN. (Examining head.) Most marvellous ! I must ascertain the dimensions of your head, young man.

GILES. Will it hurt ?

BAL. Hurt ? How can measuring your head hurt ? I'll bring my newly invented caputometer and do it at once. (Aside.) I mustn't lose sight of him at any price. I must discover what that remarkable prominence means. (Aloud.) I'll not be long ; in the meantime you may consider yourself engaged on the terms mentioned in the advertisement. Wait till I return. *Exit, L. U. E.*

GILES. What a queer, good-natured old chap that is ! Quite different from Jemima. He says I may consider myself engaged, Jemima says I mayn't.

NELLY enters c. door and approaches GILES quietly.

Hang it, I did think that lass cared more for a fellow than—

NEL. (Touching his shoulder.) Cousin Giles, hush !

GILES. (Starting.) Why it's never—yes—no—it is though ; it's my pretty little cousin Nelly. (Shakes her hand energetically.) Why I'm struck all of a heap. How did you come here ? How—

NEL. Don't shout so, Giles. (Looks off nervously.) Speak lower, and I'll explain.

GILES. Yes ; but how are you ? I can hardly believe it's you. Why, how you've growed. It seems only the other day we were

playin' together down at Slowcross village. Do you remember that afternoon I went birds'-nestin', an' how you cried 'cos I took the young birds out o' the nests? Ha! ha!

NEL. Yes, I remember.

GILES. An' then I kissed you to make you give over cryin', an' you boxed my ears. Ha! ha! ha!

NEL. Oh, don't make such a noise, Giles.

GILES. I'm powerful glad to see you, Nelly. Shake hands again. Why, you don't seem pleased to see me at all!

NEL. I'm very glad to see you, cousin Giles, but—*(aside)* oh dear, how can I make him understand? *(aloud)* but I don't want the people in this house to know we're related, Giles.

GILES. Not know we're related! Why, Nelly, you beant 'shamed o' your cousin Giles, be you?

NEL. Of course I'm not ashamed of you; quite the reverse, Giles. But, you see, I'm governess here, and—*(aside)* oh dear! *(aloud)* and Mr. Baldwin's extremely particular about his pedigree, and he mightn't like to have his children educated by a person—me, for instance—who was related to—to—

GILES. To me, for instance. Oh, but you needn't mind that. Sit down here, and I'll tell you a secret—*(places chairs c.)* NELLY *glances off in every direction, and sits down timidly.* A secret, Nelly. You see, I come all the way here o' purpose to be near Jemima, and give up a good place to come; but what does she do but throw me over as if I was of no 'count at all. Now, I'll tell yo' what. Never mind old Baldun—or whatever they call un—knowin' as how we're cousins. Tell him so to his face, leave his house, and marry me.

NEL. Marry you, Giles!

GILES. Yes, marry me. Bless you, don't be astonished. I don't mind it a bit. I'll do it just to spite Jemima.

NEL. Thank you, Giles; it's very good of you to offer, I know; but—I'm already engaged.

GILES. You're engaged! Who's your sweetheart?

NEL. Oh—a young man—

GILES. I should think so. Now, look here, is he taller than me?

NEL. Well, scarcely so tall, I think.

GILES. Is he heavier? Is he stronger? Is he thicker round the calf of the leg than me?

NEL. Why, really Giles, I don't know.

GILES. To be sure he aint. Then throw him over like Jemima threw me over, and marry me. I'll do it. I don't mind it a bit, bless you.

NEL. But thank you, Giles, I'd rather not throw him over, as you call it. You know strength and weight, and—ah—that sort of thing, aren't everything.

GILES. Oh, he's rich then?

NEL. No, he's not rich; but he can sing divinely.

GILES. So can I.

NEL. And then he writes—

GILES. I can write, too.

NEL. Oh, but he writes stories—

GILES. I never wrote no stories ; but I can tell them—thumpers.

NEL. (*continuing*). And poetry—oh, so pretty, you've no idea. He wrote me such a charming song the other day, to an air he knew I was fond of.

GILES. Let's hear it.

NEL. I like it so much, I think I will. (*Goes to piano and arranges music.*) But mind, Giles, if anyone comes you mustn't let them know you know me. You understand ?

GILES. Well, if you'll sing I won't then. Go ahead.

Song.—NELLY.

O, SING AGAIN.

(AIR.—“*O, gently breathe.*”)

O, sing again the dulcet strain,
You sang that bright and happy hour,
When first we bowed 'neath Cupid's reign,
When first we felt his pleasing power.
I've heard gay songs of times gone by,
Melodious strains of yesterday ;
But one sweet song doth all outvie,
All fade before thy simple lay.

Then sing again the dulcet strain,
You sang that bright and happy hour,
When first we bowed 'neath Cupid's reign,
When first we felt his pleasing power.

I deem its air beyond compare,
Soft falls each note upon the ear ;
Its words possess a virtue rare :
They raise the soul, the heart they cheer.
In sooth, its charms soar high above
All song that e'er my ear did thrall ;
But 'tis the voice of her I love
That makes me love it more than all.

Then sing again the dulcet strain,
You sang that bright and happy hour,
When first we bowed 'neath Cupid's reign,
When first we felt his pleasing power.

GILES. Yes, it's not so very bad, but it's nothin' like a song I made up.

NEL. A song you made up, Giles ? Oh, I *should* so like to hear it.

GILES. Should you ? Then you shall ; just to let you hear your young man aint the only one as makes poetry up. It goes to the tune o' “*Joe Muggins*” (*sings*) tol de rol ol de rol ; like that,

you know. Maybe yo' know it by its new name, "Mappen I may."

NEL. I think I do.

GILES. All right then, just claw them bones for me, so as to give both songs fair play.

NEL. Go on then (*plays*.)

Song.—GILES.

NO, NOT A BIT OF IT.

One night I went coortin' a tidy young lass,
('Twas said 'at her feyther had saved a bit brass);
'Twur a long lonesome road, but I didn't complain,
And I didn't turn back on account o' the rain.

No, not a bit of it; rainy or dry,
I don't mind the weather the least bit, not I.

She made me quite welcome; I sat down i' th' nook.
Says she, "Lad, thou'rt hungry, I see by thy look;
Would ta like to sit down to a fry off the fitch,
Or a wedge o' roast beef, hap thou doesnt care which?"

(Spoken) Said I—

"No, not a bit of it; roast, boil, or fry,
I don't mind the cookin' the least bit, not I."

I finished my supper, pulled t' lass o' my knee;
Says I, "Lass, thou'll gi'e us a kiss, I can see."
She squalled, said "Be quiet, I tell thee I won't."
D'ye think 'at I minded her when she said "Don't"?

No, not a bit of it; bashful or shy,
I don't mind their manners the least bit, not I.

Well, just at this minit in popped her old dad,
Who stamped, tore, an' swore like a man 'ats gone mad.
He ended by givin' me notice to quit;
Said I, "Lad, gan on, I don't mind it a bit."

No, not a bit of it; low words or high,
I don't care for talk not the least bit, not I.

Says he, "Mary Jane," in a sort of a whine,
"If you wed him you shan't touch a penny o' mine."
Says I, "Never mind, lass," and gi'ed her a wink,
"I don't want to marry thy old daddy's chink."

No, not a bit of it; lass, dunnot sigh,
I don't care for money the least bit, not I."

Says she, "Then I do; thou'rt a fool, I can see;
I'd rayther a long way have t' money than thee."
Says I, "Then good night! I'm mistaken, I find,
But sweethearts are plentiful—don't think I mind.

No, not a bit of it; never say die,
I'll ne'er break my heart for a woman, not I."

GILES. There now! What do you think o' that? Rayther different to your young man's song, eh?

JEM. (*Entering c. door, with spectacles.*) I've found your spec—
(*Aside.*) Hollo! well I never. I did think Giles cared more for me than to go on talking with that baggage like that. The owdacious minx! Master shall know this, and Master George, too.

Exit silently, c. door.

GILES. Rayther different, eh? Can't yo' speak?

NEL. Oh, there's no comparison. But I must be going, Giles. You'll keep our relationship to yourself, won't you, Giles?

GILES. What, aint you goin' to have me after that song?

NEL. Oh, Giles! I can't—I'm promised—

GILES. Oh, hang promises! they're made to be broke, you know.

NEL. But, really, I'd rather not.

GILES. Oh, you'd rather not. Then I see how it is. You are 'shamed on me, after all. You don't care for your little cousin Giles as you used to play with down at Slowcross village when you was a little girl. You've forgot all the kisses you used to give me, when we used to play at bein' sweethearts. Now I'll tell you what it is, Nelly, I'll forgive you for not marryin' me—

NEL. Oh, thank you, Giles—

GILES. Yes, I'll overlook that, 'cos I don't particularly want you. But you must give me a kiss like you used to do, or else I shall be sure you're 'shamed on me; and if I was sure o' that I'd stand at that door an' shout out till everybody come, and then I'd tell 'em—

NEL. Oh, but you mustn't do that.

Enter MR. BALDWIN, putting on his spectacles, c. door, followed by GEORGE and JEMIMA. They step softly, and remain at back of stage.

GILES. Then you'll give us a kiss?

(MR. BALDWIN *expresses astonishment, GEORGE and JEMIMA jealousy.*)

NEL. You'll be sure to keep my secret then, Giles?

GILES. Oh, o' course. Now then!

NEL. There! (*Kisses him; GILES hugs her in his arms.*)

BALDWIN. (*Stamps on floor.*) Hem! (*They start apart.*) I couldn't have believed it! Disgraceful! (*Aside.*) That strange organ must be amativeness, it can't be veneration. (*Aloud.*) Now George, you see what sort of a woman you wanted to make your wife.

GEORGE. Oh, it's incredible! But there must be some explanation. Nelly, Miss Ray, what is the meaning of this? (*Nelly remains silent.*) You, sir (*to Giles*), how dare you behave so to this lady?

GILES. I didn't kiss her—she kissed me. But I'd like to know what you got to do wi' it. Relations can kiss if—(*puts his hand on his mouth*)—Ugh! I've let it out.

BAL. Relations! More astonishing still! What relationship do you bear to this young person?

JEM. They was very *near* relations when I seed 'em.

GILES. Never mind, Nelly, I didn't mean— If he sends you away I'll go too—I will, I don't mind it a bit.

BAL. But you haven't answered my question. How are you related?

GILES. She's my cousin, there, what more d'ye want?

GEO. Her cousin! Oh, that alters the case materially. (*Goes up to NELLY and takes her hand.*)

JEM. Oh, if they're so near kin as that, it makes a deal o' difference. (*Sidles up to GILES.*)

END OF ACT II.

POSITION OF CHARACTERS.

R. NELLY and GEORGE. BALDWIN. GILES and JEMIMA. L.

ACT III.—THE WHOLE WORD—BUMPKIN.

SCENE.—*Characters and positions same as in termination of the Second Act.*

Mr. BALDWIN. It makes a deal of difference, as Jemima says, but not enough to overcome my scruples. I'll have no more kissing, or love-making of any kind, in this house. You hear me distinctly. I'll have no more of it. Giles—I think that's your name—go at once into the dining-room; I'll follow directly, and give you instructions in laying the table.

GILES. All right; I'll lay the biggest table you've got, anywhere you like. *Exit, c. door.*

BAL. Jemima, go at once into the kitchen, and serve up dinner as soon as possible. *Exit JEMIMA, c. door.* Miss Ray, I'm afraid your pupils are awaiting their afternoon lessons. *Exit NELLY, r. u. e., taking music sheet from piano.* Hem!

GEORGE. You've made a clearance, father.

BAL. Yes, I have. I wish to speak seriously to you, George. If you persist in keeping up your intimacy with that girl, she shall leave the house. No, I can't send her away, for if I do, her loutish cousin will go with her—I heard him say as much, and then I shall lose a splendid phrenological study.

GEO. (*sarcastically*). Splendid, indeed!

BAL. No, I won't send her away; but if you thwart my wishes in this matter, I'll—I'll—hang it!—I'll disown you.

GEO. I'm really sorry, father, you should be so prejudiced against Nelly, for—

BAL. It's not prejudice, George! It's a genuine feeling, levelled not so much against the girl, as her boorish cousin.

Enter GILES, c. door, unobserved by Mr. BALDWIN and GEORGE.

Why where's your family pride? Would you marry a girl who was so nearly related to such a great clownish clodhopper as—

GILES. Me, I suppose. (*Mr. BALDWIN and GEORGE evince*

surprise.) Now, I can't stand that. If you mean to 'sult me by callin' me a clodhopper, come on (*spars*), and I'll show you how a clodhopper can use his fists.

BAL. Dear me, don't; put down those fists, Giles.

GEO. What do you mean, sirrah, by threatening—

BAL. (*Interposing*). Be quiet, George. Giles, why should you think we were talking about you?

GILES. Oh, then it warn't me you were talkin' about?

BAL. Why—hum—no, Giles.

GILES. (*Aside.*) That's a lie. However, I takes it as a sorter 'pology. (*Aloud.*) Well, then, aint you coming to show me where I must lay that table?

BAL. Oh, yes, I'm coming. (*Aside.*) That remarkable elevation on his head must represent combativeness. It cannot be veneration.

GILES. You're comin', are you? Come on, then. I waited till I was tired, and then come to look for you. *Exit, c. door.*

BAL. Remember my words, George. *Exit, c. door.*

GEO. Yes, I remember your words, and bitter ones they are. I hoped to be able to overcome all difficulties till this awkward rustic came on the scene. He'll never consent while the lout remains within vision, consequently I must get him away by some means. I wonder if the cook—ah! she's here.

Enter JEMIMA, c. door, looking about.

JEM. You didn't see nothing of a gridiron, did you, please?

GEO. No, I haven't, Jemima; but come here (*takes money from pocket.*) I have something here worth a dozen gridirons.

JEM. La, sir.

GILES passing c. door with a pile of plates, pauses, and looks in.

GILES. (*Aside.*) What's them two after? Dang it! It's right cousin Nelly should know o' these goin's on. (*Passes out of sight.*)

GEO. Yes (*keeping his hand shut*), worth a dozen gridirons, I assure you. But I want you to do something for it. You know Giles, the new servant?

JEM. Yes, sir. (*Aside.*) I should think I did.

GEO. I want him sent away. I have a particular reason for it.

JEM. I should like to know your pertickler reason, sir, please.

GEO. Well—to tell you the truth—he stands in the way of my marriage with a certain lady. You understand—

JEM. (*Aside.*) Ah, I see; it's quite like a story. He's jealous of Giles. He thinks Giles stands the best chance o' gettin' me; and he wants me hisself. Lor, how nice!

GEO. I know you can easily make his situation so unpleasant that he won't stop; so— (*Gives money.*)

JEM. You wants me to make the place too hot for him?

GEO. You understand, I see. (*GILES and NELLY peep in at c.*

door.) If you succeed, I'll give you a new dress to be married in—to be married in—you understand. (Pats her cheek playfully.)

JEM. La! sir, you gents have such a taking way. (Lays her hand on his arm.)

GILES. (Aside.) I wish he'd take hisself away.

GEO. (Aside.) Ye powers! she's awfully familiar, but I mustn't offend her.

NEL. (Aside to GILES.) Oh, the traitor! Oh, the vixen! I could tear out my eyes, Giles.

GILES. (Aside to NELLY, soothingly.) Don't ye, Nelly, don't ye.

JEM. (Aside.) He's very slow and quiet. I'll see if I can't stir him up. (Aloud.) But poor Giles, I hardly like sendin' on him away; he's an old sweetheart o' mine, and I hardly like quittin' him till I'se sure of a better!

GEO. (Aside.) The dickens! (Aloud.) Oh, but I know you'll have no more to say to Giles. You'll drive him away, won't you? As I told you before, you're a pretty girl, Jemima. You'll soon get a better husband than Giles. He's only a country bumpkin—an uncouth villager.

GILES. I can't stand that. (Advances, followed by NELLY.) Who's an untruth pillager? You're another. Come on (spars), come on, and I'll soon settle your business.

GEO. (clenching his fist.) You insolent cur! If you say another disrespectful word, I'll make you rue it. (Girls scream.)

GILES. (Spars.) Come on then, come an' do it.

GEO. Don't agitate yourself, Nelly.

GILES. Don't be afar'd, Jemima. (To GEORGE,) Come on.

NEL. Oh! I'm fainting—oh! (Falls into GEORGE's arms.)

JEM. Oh! catch me! I'm a goin' off. (Falls in sham faint, L. C. GILES catches her.)

GILES. (After a pause.) I say, guvner, this is a nice mess. How's your's comin' on? (GEORGE fans NELLY with handkerchief, but does not reply. Seeing this, GILES feels for handkerchief, and not finding one, fans JEMIMA with his coat-tail.) Think mine'll do directly. (Pause.) Say, guvner, you can use your fists pretty well, eh?

GEO. (Sternly.) You shall have a specimen directly.

GILES. (Aside.) Looks as if he could. (Aloud.) Oh, but it frightens the gals so, I think we'd better not fight,—so—hang it, it sticks i' my throat—so I axes pardon—there!

GEO. Keep a civil tongue in your head for the future, then, and say no more about it. (Turns to NELLY.) Ah! see, her eyelids tremble, a faint tinge returns to her cheeks, she opens her eyes!

GILES. Jemima's openin' her peepers, too!

NEL. (Reviving.) Ah!—Who?—Where?—Ah, I recollect. (Endeavours to move.) Release me, George Baldwin.

JEM. Oh!—When?—What?—Which? Oh, I remembers, Leave go. (Aside.) That's the way she done it.

GEO. Release you! You would fall, Nelly. What do you mean?

GILES. What's the good o' sayin' "Leave go?" You can't stand.

NEL. You're a traitor! Release me, George. You do not love me. That odious girl. (*Frees herself, and turns her back on GEORGE.*)

JEM. You're a willin, Giles. That owdacious female. (*Wriggles out of GILES' arms, and turns her back to him.*)

GEO. What, jealous, Nelly? Ha! ha! ha!

GILES. Who's a willin? What owdacious female?

GEO. I was only planning a little stratagem to hasten our union, Nelly; that was all.

JEM. You're a willin, Giles. You don't care for me. I was only a try—try—tryin' on you. (*Sobs.*)

GEO. I love you as devotedly as ever, Nelly.

GILES. I don't care for you? Who says so? I do—lots.

NEL. How foolish I've been! Can you forgive me, George? (*GEORGE embraces NELLY.*)

JEM. You do? Then I forgives you.

GILES. (*Hugging JEMIMA.*) Hooray!

Enter Mr. BALDWIN c door, with his hat on, and a letter in his hand.

BAL. (*Pausing in astonishment.*) Confusion! (*Lovers start asunder.*) What is the meaning of this?

GILES. Well, fust of all, the gals went off 'cos I asked the young gent to "Come on." They was jealous a bit when they come round; but we soon made all square.

BAL. "Going off?" "Coming on?" "Round?" "Square?" What on earth—? George, what is the reason—? But stay; it's ridiculous to ask reasons of lovers, who are the most unreasonable beings in existence. Let me act reasonably myself. First of all, here is a letter I received from the postman as I was going out. (*Hands letter to GEORGE.*) After what has occurred, I shall stay in—(*takes off his hat*)—and someone else shall go out. Jemima, you are discharged; leave the house within an hour. Giles, your engagement is at an end.

GILES. Ax your pardin, our engagement's only just startin' afresh.

BAL. (*Continuing.*) Miss Ray, your services—

GEO. (*After glancing at letter.*) Hurrah! Victory at last! Listen, father. How erroneous have been your prophecies respecting my literary attainments. (*Reads letter.*)

"Dear Sir,

"Your novel, 'Trust and Trial,' is highly satisfactory. Enclosed you have cheque for £100."—Here it is—"Will undertake to send you another £100 if a second edition is called for within twelve months. Trusting these terms are satisfactory, we conclude by expressing a hope that we may be favoured with the first sight of your future productions.

"Yours truly,

"PROOF & VOLLMUS."

Hurrah!

BAL. (*Aside.*) A hundred pounds ! Hum ! Well, the boy has something in him, after all.

GEO. Now, Nelly, I can claim your hand, for—

NEL. (*Interrupting.*) And I must withhold it !

GEO. Withhold it !

NEL. I cannot accept you against your father's wish. Though I love you dearly, I have too much pride to—to—(*Breaks down.*)

BAL. (*Aside.*) Hum ! The girl has something in her, too.

GEO. Father, I hope you'll not carry your opposition further.

JEM. And *I* hopes you'll get another cook, sir, as 'll make Panjinggo puddin's proper. An' I'm sure you'll *never* find one as 'll think so much of you as to make you a new kind of calf-brain jelly all out on her own head, as I d—d—did. (*Sobs.*)

BAL. (*Aside.*) She's a capital cook; there's something in that—

GILES. An' are your goin' to send me away without measurin' my head ?

BAL. (*Aside.*) Oh, I forgot ; there's something in that, too. Pity they're all so much in love. Nothin' but matrimony will cure 'em, I'm afraid. (*ALOUD.*) Hum ! Young people, I'm an old fool ; I relent. I forgive you all ; get married as soon as you like.

GEO. Oh, rapture ! (*Embraces NELLY.*)

GILES. Oh, catch her ! (*Flings his arms round JEMIMA.*)

NEL. (*Goes up to MR. BALDWIN and kisses his cheek.*) Oh, you have made me so happy, father.

(*JEMIMA attempts to follow NELLY's example, but GILES interposes.*)

GILES. (*Dragging her back.*) Come, I can't stand that, he's not your father, you know.

JEM. (*Playfully.*) What, jealous, Giles ? You'd best not be jealous after we're married, or I'll raise another lump on your head with the ladle.

BAL. Raise another lump !—ladle ! Ah, I've been deceived. (*Feels GILES' head.*) It has decreased considerably.

GILES. You deceived yourself then. If I be a rough clodhopper, I aint the man to tell a lie. If I be an uncultivated bumpkin, I'm not a bad sort. Am I ?

GEO. { By no means.

NEL. { Together. Quite the reverse.

JEM. { More 't'other.

GILES. (*To Mr. BALDWIN.*) Am I, mister ?

BAL. No, Giles, you are not a bad sort, by any means, and I'm certain we shall all feel very much gratified if the indulgent friends before us can only pass an equally favourable verdict on

A COUNTRY COUSIN.

CURTAIN.

Positions at fall of Curtain.

R. GEORGE. NELLY. MR. BALDWIN. JEMIMA. GILES. L.

TO CHRISTMAS.

AN IDYLL.

BY JAMES W. AITKEN.

Unto thee our thoughts are turning,
With a fond and reverent yearning,
Other pleasures idly spurning,

Longing for the joys thou'lt bring.
In thy fleecy robes thou standest,
Of all seasons aye the grandest,
Old and hoary, yet the brandest

New, and of our revels king.
With thee wintry winds come gliding,
And Jack Frost trusts to thy guiding,
On our lakes and ponds abiding,

Freezing all he comes athwart.
Pleasure causing is thy mission,
Giving birth to dream and vision,
Of the fetes and games Elysian

That attend thy merry court.
Under mistletoe we're kissing,
Sorrow from our hearts dismissing,

Happy as the day is long ;
Grey haired men their age forgetting,
Swell the tide of fun that's setting,
And the mourner stays his fretting,

As the ball of joy rolls on.
Pass around the flowing glasses,
Pledging health to men and lasses,
Wishing joy among all classes,

Send the merry joke around ;
Hear the free and joyous laughter,
At the spree it follows after,
Ringing through the roof and rafter,

Merry, healthy, happy sound.

Then up with your glasses, and drink to the name
Of Old Father Christmas, of evergreen fame ;
Shout " Welcome, Old Christmas," still ever the same.
For again and again, as time quickly flies,
He comes with the frosts, and reigns o'er the ice ;

And though old and hoary,
His annual story

Creates smiling faces and makes sparkling eyes.

Then let us be gay,
And cheerfully say
" A right merry Christmas to all on this day."

DICK'S FAIRY.

By JOSEPH SARE.

"Longreach Park, nr. Dublin,
"November, 1871.

"MY DEAR ARTHUR,

"Since leaving the office of Messrs. Scrapecash & Co. I have fallen upon "goodly lines," and have done what I often before vowed never to do, viz., got "spliced." I have a respectable mansion, a tidy estate, and a regular "fairy" for a wife. I write this to ask you if you will come and spend your approaching holidays at Longreach, where you will ever be a welcome visitor. I can provide you a good bed, a good horse, and a first-rate gun, and to cap all, I can find you some capital sport. Please write at once, and say what day you will come, and I will meet you at the station.

"I remain, yours, the same as ever,

"DICK WEBBER.

"Mr. Arthur Wilton."

I held the above characteristic letter in my hand for some time, musing over its contents. It was short, but to the point; just like all Dick's letters. All the pleasure of accepting such an invitation at once flashed across my mind. What a relief from the continual scratch, scratch of my pen in Scrapecash's ledgers! I should here remark that Dick Webber had been a fellow clerk with me some twelve months previous, when he left for his holidays, and had not been heard of since, except by his resignation—to the great Scrapecash—of his situation, as senior clerk. Old Scrapecash was so confounded at this sudden and unexpected event, that, without thinking what he was doing, he offered me the position and salary of the departed one, which he greatly regretted afterwards, because he had to pay me £50 more per annum for doing a trifle less work. Dick and I had been such great friends during his stay in the musty offices wherein we performed our daily labour, that I had been somewhat surprised at not hearing from him. To pen an answer, gladly accepting his kind invitation, was the work of the next five minutes. I could but feebly express the joy and hilarity I felt at the anticipated change, so will not attempt it.

It was a month afterwards, a few days before Christmas, that I jumped out of the train at the H—— station, with my little valise in my hand. There was Dick looking out for me, with his old genial smile upon his countenance. He welcomed me with such a hearty pressure of the hand as almost to bring tears in my eyes. "Here, Tim, take this gentleman's luggage and put it in the car, and drive home. Come along with me, Arthur, I have a horse saddled for you outside." And saying this, he led the way towards a couple of bay horses, held by a groom. We mounted

and rode off. As we ascended a steep hill, our horses proceeding at a walk, rendered conversation easy. Amongst other topics, I inquired how it was that he had never returned to our office, and the particulars of his getting "spliced," as he called it. "Well," said he, "I thought you'd be curious on that point, so I'll tell you the whole story from beginning to end, 'twill save a lot of questions. You remember when I left old Scrapecash, 'twas about this time last year, I had a month's holiday, so I came down this part of the country on a visit to my uncle, who lives about three miles beyond Longreach Park. He found me a gun, and I amused myself with shooting a few rabbits and small birds for the first week of my stay here; by that time it became rather monotonous and dull, for uncle was not very well off, and therefore could not provide me any other amusement. I was thinking of taking my departure, and going somewhere else, in search of more exciting pastime, when I was asked by a neighbour of uncle's if I had ever been to a theatrical performance, as one was to be given that evening. Fancy, Arthur! The idea! to think that I, a Londoner born and bred, should be supposed never to have seen a theatrical performance! Well, after all, it was only an amateur affair, but I determined to go and see it. As I arrived at the town it began to snow; the flakes came down as though the snow had received special orders to cover the earth in its white mantle in an exceedingly short space of time. I was glad to get out of it, and so rushed into the hall, put down a shilling—which was the price of a reserved seat—and was shown into a room more than half full of persons, mostly the farmers of the neighbourhood and their families.

"As I took my seat close to the curtain, which divided the audience from the temporary stage, I took a good look round, but I needn't trouble you with a description of the place, because you can guess pretty well what a country affair like that would be. I had not been seated long before there entered a young lady, followed by a man of very unprepossessing features. They took their seats in a line with myself, the lady sitting in the seat next to me. I could not help noting and admiring her wonderful beauty, and there and then I fell desperately in love with her. Her companion I hated at first sight, and doubly so when I fancied that the little 'fairy' at my side shrank from him with ill-disguised aversion.

"I paid no heed to the play whatever, my whole attention and thoughts being with the couple at my side. They were both well dressed, and I could see at a glance, both by their manner and that of those around them, that their station in society was far above the general company. I was puzzling myself as to the relationship between the two, when I was partly set at ease by hearing a half whisper in my rear, 'Arrah, but that's 'er guardian's nephew, just coom over from Lunnon; not that un, but the t'other.'

"I was greatly surprised at the sudden fall of the curtain and the consequent rising of the audience to depart. I was still more surprised, when I consulted my watch, to find that the two hours of amusement had passed. I could have sworn I had only been

there half an hour! Such is the magic power of love, my boy! The all-engrossing couple rose to leave, and room was made for them to pass with as much ceremony as would have been shown to the Queen, had she been there!

"As the young lady rose her glove fell to the floor. I picked it up, and was about to return it to its owner, when I found the yeomen closed up behind her, and thus I was barred from returning the cherished article. How I envied that little glove to be sure, for it had contained her hand! How I wished that I could do the same, that I could have one opportunity to whisper my tale of love! Bah! Arthur, excuse me, I know I'm making a fool of myself, but at times my feelings overcome me. When you fall in love, my boy, if you ever do, you'll understand how I felt. I hurried out to overtake her, and, if possible, to say a word to her. As I got out she was on the point of entering a carriage. Her companion was talking to some country fellow almost or quite as ill-looking as himself. I seized the opportunity of offering the young lady my assistance to enter the carriage. She thanked me with a look which I shall never forget. It was expressive of joy and thankfulness, combined with fear. I returned the glove, my heart too full to allow of speech, now that I had the opportunity. She held out her tiny hand to me, which I reverently raised to my lips, but it was instantly withdrawn, and I looked up to behold the dark scowling face of her companion bent upon me. 'Out of the way there, you Irish lout; what the d—— are you doing there?' he shouted, at the same time pushing me roughly aside. Perhaps you can imagine my temper at that moment! I seized him by the collar, and would have thrashed him within an inch of his life, had I not been pulled off by the surrounding farmers, and held back until the carriage and its occupants were far out of sight. Well, of course I thought that I should never see my 'fairy' again, but I did, and on the very next morning too.

"I had taken a long walk with my gun in hand out westward, when I began to feel tired, for the snow had fallen thickly, and made it difficult to walk. The wind was blowing cold too, and as I came to the old Penstead church, which is now almost in ruins, I thought I would try and shelter myself by its time-honoured walls. I placed my gun at my side, and leaned against the eastern wall in deep thought over the last night's adventure, when I was suddenly startled by the roll of carriage wheels, and surprised at seeing the same carriage that had been driven away the night before approaching the gates of the churchyard. What could be their business here? I inquired of myself. My position enabled me to see all that would take place, whilst the angle of the wall completely hid me from view. The villainous-looking man that had called me an 'Irish lout' jumped out, saying, 'Now, Alice, step out, and come with me, in a few moments you will be made my wife; there is a priest inside the church waiting to unite us.' There was a scream heard inside the vehicle, but what was said I could not catch. He then roughly pulled the poor girl out, and told her to stand up and come-

along. 'It's no use your struggling, pretty one,' said he, 'you are in my power now, for there's none near to help you.'

"'Help! help!' she cried. 'So this is the end of your subterfuge! this is the poor sick old woman you wished me to visit! Monster! I will never marry you! I will die first!' and she tried to free herself from his grasp.

"'We shall see,' he said mockingly, as the coachman came to his assistance, and together they hurried her along towards the door of the church.

"'Yes, we shall see, villain!' I shouted, as I dashed up to them, and felled him to the ground.

"Alice, recognising me, clung to me for support, whilst the burly coachman struck out at me with his shillelagh which he drew from his pocket. I quickly avoided the blow, and levelling my gun at him, he retreated a short distance. A faint cry of alarm from the lovely being at my side caused me to turn round quickly, and thus escape a pistol-bullet fired at me by the abductor. I secured the would-be assassin, and handed him over to the people who came rushing to the spot, attracted by the cries and report of the fire-arm.

"The rest is soon told. The Irish coachman, seeing the failure of all the plans, which he had been bribed to aid in carrying out, soon came round to my wishes, and I saw my 'fairy' driven safely home. Henry Calcot, after receiving at the hands of the Irish tenantry, who are always ready to join in any row, a thorough 'drubbing,' left the neighbourhood, and never since has been heard of. It subsequently transpired that he, knowing of her guardian's absence, had taken the opportunity of coming to Longreach, representing that he had been sent by his uncle, with whom we learned afterwards, he had never been on very friendly terms.

"A few days after her guardian returned, and for my services in his absence invited 'me to come up to Longreach as often as I liked. I need hardly say that I was a constant visitor, and a few months ago I was married to my 'fairy,' with the full consent and approbation of her guardian. I am now the possessor of the finest estate down this way, so that you can understand why I did not return to Scrapecash's. By the way, Alice has a sister whom I shall have great pleasure in introducing to you. Now for a gallop to Longreach!"

We soon arrived there. It was a large estate containing a number of farms let to good tenants, besides the home grounds, which were very extensive. I was introduced to Dick's "fairy," as he called his wife, and to her sister. If I could describe female beauty in perfection, or that as near as possible, I would; but I can give you but a faint description, when I say, I never saw two lovelier ladies than these two sisters—but to me the loveliest was the 'fairy's' sister Maude. During the whole fortnight I cared not for those anticipated pleasures of horse and gun—my only delight was to be with or near Maude. To sit by her side, or to take a stroll arm in arm with her, was bliss beyond imagination, and when I at last dared to whisper of the burning love within me,

to know that I was beloved in return, was heaven indeed! Strange to say, I have never returned to the office of old Scrapecash. Maude has an estate in her own right, and for the present I am the manager of it. We are very busy just now with our wedding preparations. On Christmas Day, if you are in the neighbourhood of Longreach, you will hear the merry peals of our wedding bells, and if you walk up to the Park you will receive a hearty welcome from all, and especially from

“DICK’S FAIRY.”

THE RETURN.

BY G. BIRKS.

’TWAS on the eve of Christmas-day,
A traveller bent his weary way
Through streets, where eager
crowds around
The busy shops and stalls were
found.
The glaring lights, the shouts
and cries,
A very Babel seemed to rise ;
But scarce a careworn face was
seen
In all the busy, bustling scene ;
The poor man spent his little
all
As though he’d hundreds at his
call ;
And cheerful words and jokes
were said
From each to each—reserve had
fled.
The trav’ller looked from face
to face,
He stopped his weary, jog-trot
pace,
Past memories in his heart
awoke,
And thus from out his heart he
spoke :
“ And do I see again the sight,
Of hearts at Christmas-time
made light,
The blessed atmosphere that
clings

To England’s Christmas wakenings?
Oh, how my heart leaps when
I see
So many hearts from sorrow
free !
But not for me this joy of
heart,
For me in Christmas mirth no
part !
An exile by my headstrong will,
I left the good, and chose the
ill.
Once I, too, watched for Christ-
mas joys,
And felt the love that good
enjoys ;
I knew each old and hallowed
way
To honour the most blessed
day ;
Whose voice, so ready with a
tale
Of formertimes, however stale ?
Who then so ready at a game—
The old, old games, and yet the
same ?
The gaming-tables in the hall,
The holly hung upon the wall ;
The blest reunion year by year,
When friends apart again come
near.
These are the memories that
rise ;

But each one, as it rises, dies ;
 For what have I with joy or pleasure,
 Since I have thrown away my treasure?
 And now from foreign climes returned,
 What of the hopes that in me burned ?
 My mother—is she living now ?
 My father—is his lowered brow,
 Which still I see upon me bent,
 Relaxed—on pardon now intent ?
 I scarce can hope a father's care,
 A brother's smile, will be my share.
 And what if all trace should be gone
 Of injured parents, friends, and home ?”

* * * * *
 He stood amid the sudden snow,
 Then sudden started on to go ;
 He'd seek his fate, whate'er might come,
 And either find, or lose his home.
 With hurried, eager step, he trod
 Each well-remembered narrow road.
 At last he stands before a door,
 Oh God ! what fortune is in store ?
 He knocks, and feels his heart stand still,
 And feels the dread reverse would kill ;
 The door is opened, “ Sir, your name,
 Your business, and from whence you came ? ”
 With aching heart he scans the face,
 But sees there no familiar trace ;
 He turns away in mute despair ;

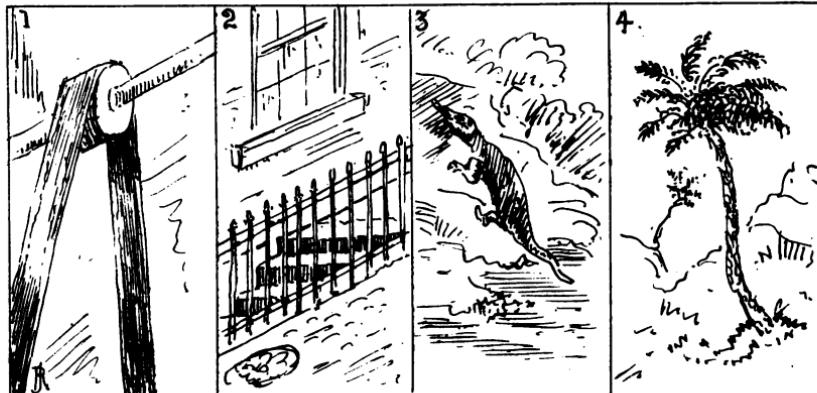
What form is that one standing there ?
 “ Oh father ! am I, can I be,
 Forgiven for your misery ? ”
 He falls upon his knees, and prays ;
 But hear the word the father says :
 “ My son, when centuries, years ago,
 Our Saviour came to bear our woe,
 While shepherds by their flocks reclined,
 The glory from the heavens shined ;
 And while they gazed in wondrous awe,
 The angels gave the charge they bore.
 To God is glory ever due ;
 We now the highest need renew,
 With peace on earth, and God's goodwill
 To men who still earth's places fill.”
 * * * * *
 And shall we, creatures of His hand,
 Refuse the lesson He has planned ?
 Nay ! rather let us learn each year,
 That Christmas brings us still more near
 To human hearts, and want and woe.
 Then let us to our brothers go,
 With this blest message to their hearts,
 That light and happiness imparts,
 And let the mercies we enjoy
 Teach us our moments to employ
 In practising this text, we find
 Of peace, goodwill to all mankind.



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A DISH OF NUTS TO CRACK.

GATHERED IN THE KINGDOM OF PUZZLEDOM, BY THE GREAT
SPHINX,—WALLACE MUIR.

—o—

I.—ENIGMAS.

I.

IN yon old dismantled cot,
A mother is sitting alone,
Sighing for a form by the world
forgot,
Mourning a long-lost one.
Ah ! why is she sitting so sad at
heart ?
It is folly 'gainst fate to
mourn,
For is it not written that dust
thou art,
And to dust shall yet return ?
A man may boast of his strength
and skill,
And show off each stalwart
limb,
But roam as he will, he will find
me still
Patiently waiting for him.
Though he wander afar, where
the redmen are,
O'er the wild wave's seething
foam ;
Like a demon grim I pounce on
him,
Though thousands of miles
from home.
And though millions strong, I
can count my throng,
The cry is still they come,
Come, come, come,
I have still a bed for
some,
The way is short, and the path
is clear,
And there never came one but
was welcome here,
So be not afraid to come.

They gaze on those sightless eyes,
Bereft of both soul and
breath ;
They mourn o'er the form as it
lowly lies,
And they curse the grim demon
death ;
But 'twas I that sent death on
his track,
And his fame he doth bravely
win,
And he shall not lack his suit of
black
As long as he brings them in.
Since sin and death in the world
began,
My gates I have closed to
none ;
Come as they can, child, woman,
or man,
I take them every one.
The lord of state, who used with
pride,
To gaze on his turreted dome,
Finds a place by the half-starved
beggarman's side,
I just lay them as they come ;
For good, for ill, I take them
still,
And the cry is still they come,
Come, come, come,
It seems a strange thing
to some ;
Their eyes are so blind that they
cannot see,
That the more that is taken by
man from me,
The larger I become.
WILLIAM AITKEN (Sorn.)

2.

I was with Adam when he fell,
Aye, even in his fall;
With Abel and with Cain as well,
But not with Eve at all.

I was with Noah in the ark,
And in the threatening roar
Of water, which that famous bark
Aloft in safety bore.

I was with Jacob in his flight,
Though he who was behind,
The brother spoiled of his birth-right,
Still had me, as you'll find.

And in the ladder Jacob saw;
In each of Joseph's dreams;
A portion still of Moses' law,
Though found 'mong Babel's streams.

But not alone to Scripture race
Of man am I confined,
For I am seen in every place
As well as all mankind;
But strange, I'm neither I nor
you,
Though always part of same.
Now, from these hints, dear reader, you
Can surely tell my name.

JAMES WHITTAKER.

3.

In the castle, in the cottage,
In the raging sea,
In the clear and silvery streamlet,
On the flowery lea;
With each pretty feathered warbler,
With the humming-bee.

Ne'er with the high, ne'er with the low,
Not in the angry main,
Never in the flowing fountain,
Nor yet upon the plain;
E'en in the little singing bird,
You'll look for me in vain.

W. MUIR.

II.—CHARADES.

1.

A sprightly lad Horace, so blithesome and gay,
A kind lad was Horace to me;
Sad memory recalls oft that bleak Christmas-day

When first he set off for the sea.
Ten long years have passed since his *first* he did leave,
His friends and relations so dear;

Whilst others are happy his absence I grieve,
As each merry Christmas draws near.

These years have gone by without bringing me joy,
Oh, dreameth he ever of me?
Oh, ocean, does skim o'er thy surface my boy?

Oh, sleeps he beneath thee, oh sea?
Those thoughts so conflicting harassing my brain,
His safety do cause me to fear;
Instead, then, of pleasure, my mind harbours pain,
As each merry Christmas draws near.

I've just had a dream that my son liveth still,
In the stranger's land, far o'er the main;
But confined to a *second*, so dang'rously ill,
I can scarce hope to see him again.
Oh, had he ne'er left me, his fate to lament,

The season which brings
others cheer,
In place of this sorrow a joy had
lent,
As each merry Christmas
draws near.

Hope bright'ning, I fancy
dreams cannot be true;
Hark! a rap at the door, can
it be?
Yea, truly, the postman: "A
letter for you,
It has come from far over the
sea."
From afar o'er the sea, do ye
tell me? well, then,
My son is alive, it is clear;
With a sight of my boy I'll re-
joice yet again,

As some merry Christmas
draws near.

Yes, 'tis his own handwriting,
hear what he says:—
"Dear mother, I'm healthy
and strong,
And now bound my *total*;
within a few days
I will see you—the time
seemeth long;
Though silent, I have been in-
dustrious, and so
I've got something your future
to cheer;
You'll forget that bleak Christ-
mas so long, long ago,
As each merry Christmas
draws near."

JAMES ALCORN.

2.

Thus it is with not a few
Life's uncertain journey through,
Ofttimes calling to their aid.
First transposed, bereft of head,
Living wayward as the wind,
Till too late they wake to find
All their greatly boasted whole
Nothing but a greasy pole.

WILLIAM AITKEN (Sorn).

3.

Wide raged the battle on the plain,
Spears shook, and falchions flashed amain;
Fell England's arrow flight like rain;
Crests rose, and stooped, and rose again,
Wild and disorderly.—Scott's "Marmion."

From my *first* came the Scots
in the splendour of war,
And fast spread the fame of
their coming afar;
For in legions they came but to
conquer and slay,
And rapine and murder lay thick
on their way.
Beat back and crushed down by
their fierce, warlike foes,
From each blow, still uncon-
quered, our ancestors rose;
Rushed with brave hearts to the
wild deadly strife;

And like Englishmen—struggled
for freedom and life.
Both e'er *third the second, as war's*
billows roll,
So foemen met foemen in strife
on my *whole*.
Our sires, with clasped hands,
raised their voices on high,
And swore that that day they
would conquer or die.
Then quick round their standard
a circle they formed;
That standard so mystic, so
sacred and charmed.

With a yell which rose high o'er
our ancestors' cheers,
The Scots bravely dashed on
that circle of spears ;
But, as beats the wild billow in
vain 'gainst the rock,
And recoils, but to turn once
again to the shock,
So they dashed but in vain, and
then fiercely recoiled,

For each shock was withstood,
and each brave effort foiled.
Beat back in their turn, they
now fled from the plain,
Their retreat to my *first* strewed
with wounded and slain ;
They fled from my *whole*, and no
more did return
Till after their victory at famed
Bannockburn.

WALLACE ROBERTS.

4.

Squire Black, a most eccentric
man,
Was known the country round ;
He boasted of his house and clan,
Their equals none were found.
Says he, "I'll hold an argument
With any in the State ;"
His thoughts were on my *total*
bent,
His subject of debate.
Revolution now lurks in the land,
Great discontent is shown ;

The people all my *whole* demand.
Who in oppression groan.
In such like strains this doughty
squire
His hearers would address ;
To gain my *whole* was his desire,
What was it, can you guess ?
My *primal* is an island small,
Near the Bay of Biscay O ;
My *final* is a seat for all
Who to kirk or chapel go.
WILLIAM MOUNTFORD.

5.

To be the *first* of all my *whole*,
Beyond dispute she's reckoned,
Although it must be owned, she
is
A little bit my *second*.
Were it not for this, o'er ev'ry
heart,

She would hold supreme con-
trol,
And be the *first* of all the land,
As well as of my *whole*.

MISS R. SCOTT.

6.

At Wallace' name, what Scottish blood
But boils up in a spring-tide flood !—*Burns' Epistle to W. Simpson.*

My *first*, oft broken by the victor's
blades,
Flows gently on through Eng-
land's sylvan glades ;
When peacefully for ages has its
waters ran
Far from the traffic's hum, the
busy haunts of man ;
Its banks ne'er felt my *second*'s
rattling roll,
Ne'er felt such strife as centred
round my *whole* !

My *last*, ye *third*, through Dum-
fries' valleys winds,
And in the Solway Firth an
opening finds ;
Whence, unconfined, its onward
path now free,
It joins its waters with the
boundless sea,
And they together flow, together
onward roll,
Till Falkirk's near, till Stirling
and my *whole*.

My whole, where Wallace brave
triumphant rose,
'Twas there he conquered Scotia's
daring foes,
'Twas there false Cressingham
his deserts gained,
'Twas there the Scots their laurels
first regained,

'Twas there revenge for all their
woes, for all their griefs, they
found,

'Twas at my whole their efforts
brave were first by victory
crowned.

WALLACE ROBERTS.

III.—METAGRAM.

Some say that I a colour am,
And some that I'm a tree,

But true it is that I am both ;
Change head, and you will see.

1. A herb, a fish, or beam of light.
2. What doth precede the dismal night.
3. A fairy or an enchantress.
4. A kind of grass you'll quickly guess.
5. A song or poem I declare.

6. A bird which is of beauty rare
7. A Scottish river now detect.
8. For working hard, what all expect.
9. A merry month this is, you'll say.
10. Without a doubt 'tis very gay.

W. MUIR.

IV.—DOUBLE ACROSTICS.

Though thou art calling us
Once more to toil,
We welcome thy coming,
We like thy bright smile.
Thou comest with glad beams
To nourish the soil.

Once more thy dark mantle
Is spread over all ;
The fields and the woodlands
Are wrapt in thy pall,
But 'tis ours to obey thee
Whene'er thou dost call.

1. In the gloomy dungeon cell,
With the prisoner I dwell ;
Far beneath the busy town,
I assist to keep him down.
2. Transposed, behold the ruddy glow
On you mountain summit's brow,
Blazing with a fearful sound,
Spreading ruin all around.
- 3 Far away from city street,
Far away from hurrying feet,
Far away from mortal's ken,
In a deep secluded glen
- 4 Started cattle seek the shade,
In the depths of yonder glade ;
From his glorious perch on high

- The blazing sun shines brilliantly.
5. In this, transposé far away,
Ruin reigned for many a day ;
Human blood like water shed,
Babes and mothers murderéd.
6. When will war and strife be done ?
Think upon what I have done,
Spreading death and woe
around,
Every rood a battle-ground.
7. Day's grim toil is ended now,
Soft the evening breezes blow,
And a shadow soft and still
Settles over vale and hill.

WILLIAM AITKEN (Sorn).

2.

Day by day, with care unceasing,
Men first are striving to possess;
1. In summer when the sun
shines bright,
This to all nature joy
restores,
But when the winter season
comes
'Tis only to be found in-
doors.

2. At New Year send
This to your friend.

3. This nut, 'tis incontestable,
Is very indigestible.

But, if 'tis not by last attended,
'Twill bring but little happiness.

4. At Christmas do not miss
Both poor and great
To decorate
With holly, fir and this.

5. This frequently lies
Amid custards and pies.

6. This winter's night, the fire
burns bright;
Come, draw your chairs
around,
For here, among both old and
young,
Doth joy and mirth abound.

R. W. JOHNSON.

V.—SQUARE WORDS.

1. A sorceress well known to fame.
2. A pretty Eastern female name.
3. A written or pictorial riddle.

4. My fourth, transposed, on flute, or fiddle
You'll hear; while you'll be sure to see.

5. My fifth's in Spring, on every tree. Miss R. SCOTT.

1. A citizen of Rome.
2. Of peace the emblem sure.
3. Deep caverns which contain Great wealth, in state impure.

2.

4. To turn aside, or keep away.
5. Birds' habitations now display.

W. MUIR.

VI.—TRANSPOSITION.

To wield my whole, proud kings delight,
Perch'd on Ambition's dizzy height,
No enviable position.
High on a throne, all gilded bright,
They bear this emblem of might,
They look around and grasp it tight,
And fancy they are monarchs quite,
In every condition.

My total, if you change aright,
By aid of transposition.
I saw it in the woods one night,
All dimly, in the clear moonlight;
Oh, goodness gracious, what a sight!
It gave me such a horrid fright,
It took away my senses quite,
An awful apparition.
Again transpose, to a poor wight.
If you have this, be pleased to write,
Reply with expedition.
WILLIAM AITKEN (Sorn.)

VII.—REVERSION.

A river of Ireland
Reverse, and 'twill show,

What liveth therein,
Which the angler doth know,
W. MUIR.

VIII.—QUOTATIONS.

1. "There went three kings into the East, Three kings both great and high,"	4. "He sternly set them face to face, The king before the dead."
2. "And while they swore the dog was mad, They swore the man would die."	5. "Down the broad valley, fast and far, The spectral army fled."
3. "He shook the fragment of his blade, And shouted victory."	6. "Lapp'd by a dog, go think of it, In silence and alone."
	7. "Well, hang it all, I mean to have A treadmill of my own."

WILLIAM AITKEN (Sorn.)

IX.—CONUNDRUMS.

1.

A lady, once upon a time,
A gentleman did ask,
If he could solve, by prose or
rhyme,
This strange, but simple task :

"Give something which you
don't possess,
Possess you never can,
And yet you can bestow, I guess.
What is't, good gentleman?"

JAMES ALCORN.

2.

Ance on a time a barber loon,
Wha kept a shop in Paisley
toon,
Took doon his sign, and laid it
on

The croon o' his apprentice
John;
Now, why was it, will ony
state,
Like a successful candidate ?

3.

If a noble Spaniard was fond of
the chase,
And often took part in the
same,

What part of England is that
which would trace,
Of what he was in it, the
name?

4.

Supposing, in winter
You got yourself wet,

What place in Old Erin
By that might you get?

JAMES WHITTAKER.

5.

What poet's name, with the addition of an adverb, describes his
writings?

Miss R. SCOTT.

6. What river doth for pardon
cry?

7. What river clothes both you
and I?

8. What river doth to fly con- 10. What river would a Spaniard
trive? like?
9. What river keeps us all 11. What river's drank by Pat
alive? and Mike?

12.

Should a certain great poet Pray, what Scottish town would
from out his grave rise, you express in surprise?

W. MUIR.

NOTE.—*The Kernels of the Nuts and names of the Prize Winners can be had, post-free for three stamps, of the Publisher, Mr. S. Miller, 37, Tavistock-street, Covent Garden, London, W.C., or direct from the Editor, Reading, at the close of the competition.*

PARTING WORDS

FROM THE EDITOR.

—o—

My task is done. Though arduous, it has been pleasant; and I claim indulgence, myself, for having attempted to produce, for the entertainment of the general public, a Sixpenny Annual; and for the Authors, who have ventured to submit to public criticism their early productions. I venture to say that their want of experience does not necessarily prove want of sense;

It is little by little progression is made,
It is little by little—each step and each grade
Make men become great as they do,

and if now this Annual should be favourably received by those who purchase and peruse it, encouragement will be given for the production and publication of entertaining stories, by authors who have not yet earned literary fame, for the amusement of those who desire to read other productions than those of well-known writers; and it will give me further pleasure to renew this attempt when Christmas comes again

It would be presumptuous for *me* to say that we have succeeded in producing a thoroughly good and interesting Annual; but we have done our best, and I trust that the stories I have gathered together will assist to while away some leisure hours, and to help the long winter evenings to pass quickly and pleasantly by.

Before the curtain falls, I step before the lights, and, hoping that next year our acquaintance will be renewed, I say

“ AU REVOIR,”

and making my bow, retire—not forgetting, ere we part, to pronounce the hearty old English greeting:

“ WISHING YOU ALL A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR!”

HORACE L. NICHOLSON.

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